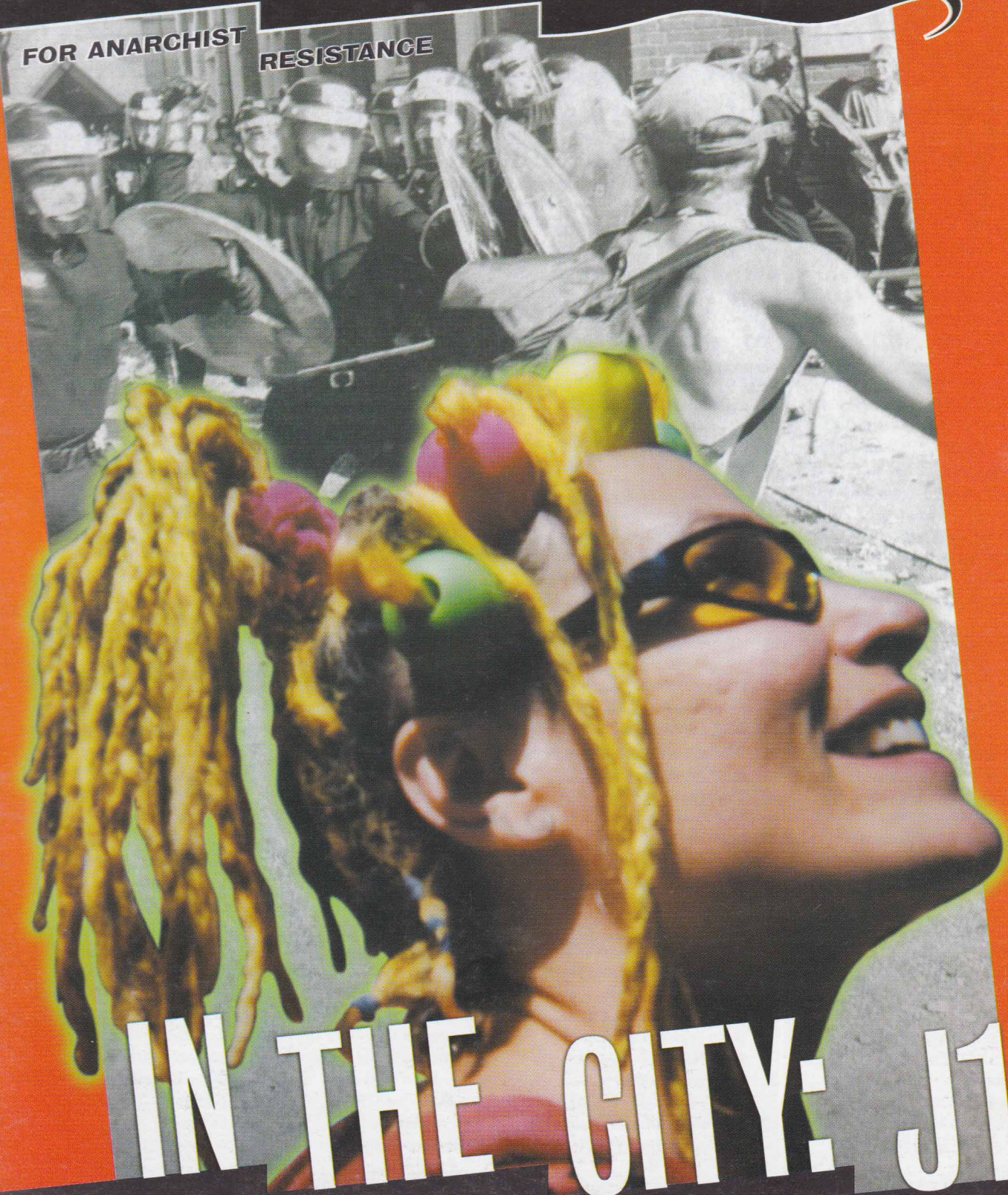


ISSUE NO. 218 • £1.50

Black Flag



FOR ANARCHIST
RESISTANCE



IN THE CITY: J18

inside → J18 around the world • drugs & guns • the history of the black banner
football's unspoken hatred • southall black sisters • interviews, reviews & the rest!

Black Flag



For a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

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Subscription – Per Four Issues
Inland & Europe – £6.00
Rest of World (Surface) – £8.00
Rest of World (Airmail) – £12.00

Bulk Orders
AK Press, PO Box 12766
Edinburgh EH8, 0131 555 5165

AK America, San Francisco
PO Box 40862, CA 94140-0682

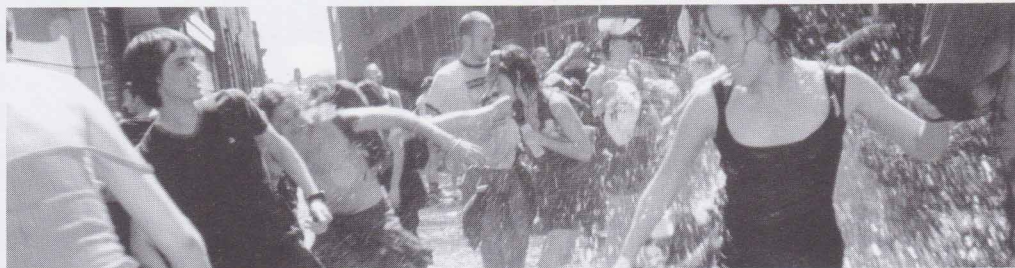
Giro Account No. 585524009

Design
Lionel & Nadine (contact via BF)

Printing
Clydeside Press, 0141 552 5519

Thanks to
Brian Belle-Fortune, for J18
photos; and Agfa Monotype
(0800 371242) for fonts

editorial



Tony Blair has helpfully told us that the class war is over. Remember this when they bring the war against drugs into your living room and as social housing, built and paid for by working class people, is sold off for city profits. We can all feel pleased with ourselves after June 18 but, no matter how many times we watch the video, exploitation and oppression continue all over the world.

J18 wasn't explicitly anarchist – a lot of the international action had little connection with what we would recognise as anarchist politics. Militant grass-roots action has never been the sole preserve of anarchists. We look at groups and movements around the world and close to home and see people we don't think we agree with fighting the same struggles in different ways. We certainly haven't got all the answers. But one thing we do know – all around the world the class war continues.

Meanwhile, you may have noticed a few changes around here... yes, you guessed it, *Black Flag* has had a much-needed, complete redesign. After all, if we propose a revolutionary transformation of society, we shouldn't be afraid of embracing a little change for ourselves. Hopefully, it also helps communicate our message more effectively, in a more accessible, contemporary and visually appealing way. We hope you like it – your feedback on the new look is actively encouraged.

After this redesign we'll be changing the name to BF, appearing on Channel 4 a lot and disappearing up our own arses into academia. Sadly this is only as true as the sayings of Blair: we're still at least as broke as any other anarchist magazine and, without admitting to intellectual bankruptcy too, we welcome both financial and written contributions.

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Social Cleansing & the End of Council Housing

At the end of the 19th century, local authorities started building housing for the poor. Charitable trusts and co-operative societies also built homes for working class people, but councils came to dominate housing in most districts, and particularly in the bigger cities. Though council housing produced some awful homes, and in the late 60s and early 70s arrogant architects were allowed to inflict their brutal theories on us, most of what was built was better than what went before.

For almost every local housing company, there is a campaign fighting against it

For 18 years the Tories attacked council housing with the divisive right to buy policy, ballots for different landlords, and so on. With the exception of right to buy, these policies failed. Tenants, when faced with the choice of the devil they knew or the devil they didn't, always opted for the council. Right to buy worked because it tapped into tenants' wishes to have more control over their homes as well as appealing to the greedy.

But after 18 years of surviving Tory attacks, council housing is going. As a local housing manager told me recently, "we survived all the Tory attacks and now we (meaning the Labour Party) are selling them off." Every council which still has it is setting up "local housing companies" to take over the stock. And for almost every local housing company, there is a tenants' or workers' campaign fighting it.

Perhaps the best known transfer was HARCA in Tower Hamlets, where a very narrow majority on the relevant estates voted to transfer out of the council's control. So, what are these local housing companies, and why are they being pushed? Their advocates say they will be able to invest in housing, unlike councils restricted by rules on public

sector borrowing, and that this investment will offset any other disadvantages. These disadvantages include changing tenancies from secure to assured, which makes it easier for the new landlord to evict tenants. Rents will rise to pay for the extra borrowing, though the companies say they will be pegged for five years or so (by which time Housing Benefit will have been slashed further and the poorest will be priced out of their homes). As council stock is fragmented,

management costs will rise as a proportion, and tenants will get less for their money.

One of the features of all the sell-off ballots is that leaseholders don't get a vote, even though they will be hit by huge bills for the improvements planned. Fair enough, you might think, they made a killing out of the right to buy. But many didn't – lured by the fantasy of home-ownership – many are stuck in flats that are now totally unsuitable (due to increase in family size, disability etc) and which they can never sell. Not surprisingly, these people would be likely to vote no, so they don't get one.

So, as anarchists, do we want to be defending control of housing by corrupt and power-hungry local councillors? Clearly no, but we should also be clear why we are against this wave of sell-offs. They do nothing to further tenants' control over their own housing. Nor do they address the real issue – the fact that there is a huge shortage of affordable homes, particularly acute in inner cities where gentrification is going on.

In Southwark, South London, the council wants to clear three popular riverside estates to make way for the new London Assembly. And while this was going on, the Council's director

for economic regeneration (yuppification?) Fred Manson said, "because social housing generates people on low incomes coming in and that generates poor school performances, middle class people stay away." Tenants' groups attacked Manson, saying this was about class-cleansing, and pushing the working class out.

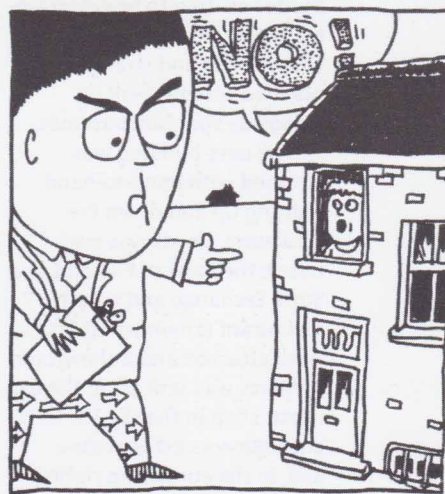
Southwark has huge areas of endless council estates built by admirers of East European Stalinist architecture, but there are also enclaves of the middle classes. Harriet Harman lives there, refusing to send her kids to a local school, preferring to make them travel an hour and a half to a grammar school in Orpington. Manson's comments, though, get it arse about face. Where should poor people live? They've already been socially cleansed from Battersea, Wandsworth and the posher bits of Clapham (or Claa'm as the chinless scum who now live there call it). There just aren't that many choices – live close to your low-paid job, your family and friends, or move to the soulless out-of-town estates.

In Hackney, the council has opted for a piecemeal approach to privatisation, but the effects are already becoming clear. On the Haggerston estate, where tenants recently lost a ballot, the new company has already made changes. Where a tenant misses an appointment for a repair, they are charged a callout fee. Insurance has gone up by £35, and the estate cleaners have had their wages cut by at least £1000. Tenants in Tower Hamlets and Lewisham have both recently voted no to sell-off plans, and a crucial vote is coming up in Coventry. Most importantly, tenants need to make sure they are properly informed. Councils spend hundreds of thousands giving their view – it's vital that those opposed get their facts right. There is potential for damage when the SWP sends ill-informed students onto estates.

Changing from a secure to an assured tenancy that contains the same clauses is really not the big deal that some people have tried to paint it.

It's important for the tenants' movement to win more of these ballots – the Labour Party are considering removing the right to vote because they keep on losing. But it is not just around sell-offs that tenants are being ignored. Workers in Tower Hamlets recently went on strike over plans to introduce a call centre and close local estate offices – after tenants had been surveyed and said no. The strike was strongly supported by tenants' groups in the borough and was partially successful in forcing the council to back down.

What is needed is a co-ordinated, nationwide campaign for proper consultation; legally-binding ballots for all



residents on all transfers, demolitions and sell-offs; rents to be pegged and kept within Housing Benefit limits, and councils allowed to borrow to invest in housing. Tenants will generally find willing allies among workers in housing, who are sick of seeing cuts in jobs and services and endless re-organisations just to massage bureaucrats' egos. If you want to help resist the end of council housing, why not get in touch with the *Defend Council Housing Campaign*, on 0171 254 2312. ■

J18 – In the City ...

For anyone who didn't notice – the June 18 occupation of the City of London (the financial district) was a riotous success. Attracting a diverse crowd it was the first demo in living memory (mine anyway) specifically against capitalism – no demands, no appeal to the government or the TUC to do anything.

A year's worth of planning paid-off on the day, maps and thousands of carnival masks were handed out free, providing some protection from the omnipresent cameras. Inspiringly, there was a move away from the passive street party punter waiting to be entertained. People worked collectively with friends and strangers and planned actions went off alongside spontaneous ones.

The Liffé building was stormed with hand-to-hand fighting up and down the escalators; Lloyds was evacuated; the Bank of England, the Stock Exchange and a flash restaurant (amongst others) were attacked and a showroom of Mercs was sent off to the big repair shop in the sky. The damage assessors list is endless and, in the eurovision rioting stakes, put London in at number one for the first time in years.

By Monday the boards were replaced with glass and the graffiti was getting steam-cleaned off. Since then the

arrest lists have grown. What was it all about then? First, and most obviously, it did put protest back on the map. Every five or six years the extra-parliamentary opposition has to kick some butt just to show that we are not just armchair theoreticians. But protest, no matter how violent, can be just

Reed Employment, New Deal entrepreneurs, were targeted but closed for the day with posters saying what good work they do. Relations between ordinary city workers and protesters were much better than at the Stop the City demonstrations of the 80s. Builders on Finsbury Square were on strike

There was a move away from the passive street party punter waiting to be entertained. People worked collectively with friends and strangers and planned actions went off alongside spontaneous ones.

a big tantrum – and just as pointless. If the day was just what people built-up to, for the whole of last year, and was then all they talked about till next year, it would be as much use as those big peace marches we used to mock.

The two main pieces of propaganda for the action, the mock paper *Evading Standards*, given out on the day, and *Squaring up to the Square Mile*, a pamphlet that described what the different city companies do, cannot be seen as representative of all those that took part in the action at every level. The day was not just about how naughty finance capital is. People on the demonstration included those well aware of how their own bosses screw them directly.

over the sacking of a safety rep, but weren't the only ones who were into what was going on.

The media wrote a lot about the use of the internet to organise and to propagate the J18 protests, some commentators appearing to suggest that this was some sort of abuse of the media. Expect more calls for internet censorship and control. There were however very few imaginative counter-measures. There were some (failed) attempts to hack the server for the J18 discussion list, notably from 'gatekeeper. herbertsmith.com', someone at a large city law firm that, from the look of things, knows less about the law and about 'information technology' than they claim.

Top investigative work from

The Sunday Times Insight team revealed that we were paid to riot. A trader told a journalist that two students told him they had been given a bus ticket, £30 and a packed lunch to come from Nottingham to riot. Rts have been strangely reticent on this one and attempts to get refunds have been met with bureaucratic demands for receipts and proof of rioting.

Friday's *Evening Standard*, always first with the facts, carried the good news that very little had happened. *Evading Standards* had been closer to the truth, even though it was printed well before June 18. Still, the story had originally come from the police chief who announced, as the Critical Mass set off at 8.00 am, "not many people have turned up and we are expecting a low-key day."

Despite all the chaos and the damage, 'city sources' claimed that blitz spirit had meant that no trading was lost. Most of the city workers spent the day at home, hanging out of windows or being unable to get back from lunch. The Liffé building was apparently closed for some reason in the afternoon. Le Quai restaurant was far from empty when people turned up for a takeaway well after lunchtime. All of which begs the question, when do these people do any work anyway? ■



All Around the World

All Around the World

Outside London and internationally, June 18 went off mostly as party or street theatre. Glasgow had a big noisy parade and there were occupations in Edinburgh in the weeks before J18. Theatrical Zapatistas featured from South Korea to Boston. It kicked off in the hippie paradise of Eugene, Oregon [see *Prisoners*, this issue] and the cops chased punks around in LA. In Europe it was mostly quiet (apart from the sound systems) but demonstrators braved a total ban on demonstrations in Belarus and held a picket of Macdonald's in the city centre. The Czechs started early, to avoid disappointment and managed to get their rioting done before rain stopped play on their June 18 demo. It is difficult to assess the impact of the actions and who was involved in different places from the different reports.

No Laughing Matter

Köln in Germany was the venue for the G8 summit and with characteristic good humour, Köln cops arrested at least 20 people in an operation to prevent a 'Laugh Parade' against the G8 summit. 350 people from the Intercontinental Caravan were surrounded by police on their way to the city centre. Amongst those arrested was Vijay Jawandhia,

president of the Inter-State Coordination Committee of Farmers' Organisations, and his wife. People from the Caravan were beaten-up and pushed to the ground while the cops racially abused them. At least two demonstrators needed medical support. 500 European supporters were also surrounded at another station but were treated a lot better by the police. The Intercontinental Caravan for Solidarity and Resistance had made a protest tour through Europe for one month. Apart from India, the participants also came from Brazil, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mexico, Colombia, Pakistan, Chile and the Ukraine. They took part in actions in eleven countries of Europe in the run up to June 18.

Uruguay

The Montevideo June 18 Network occupied the main square of the Old Town (the financial centre). At about 12.30 a type of trade fair was set up with stalls on various themes: work (selling cheap labour and focusing on child labour), education (where public education could be acquired for a modest price and the education reform was questioned), plastic (with a pvc jockey riding the Pollution Plasticsaurus, spotlighting non-returnable bottles and packaging (we're experiencing an invasion of these) and

rejecting pvc), Local Culture (with a test to see how globalised and how Uruguayan we are), TV (as the manipulator of our lives), Consumption (showing us how to be perfect consumers and have a clear conscience) and Communication, (criticising the prohibition of community and free radio stations). Also participating were some trade unions involved in disputes such as the one with Cristalerías del Uruguay. They locked-out their employees, leaving them in the street and Uruguay without its only glass factory. The unions brought along a cardboard factory with an exhibition about glass. The fishworkers' union also attended with placards protesting about their situation. Also present were the workers of the 'El Cine' supermarket who have been in occupation of the supermarket for the last two months.

The square was decorated with balloons and posters. A lot of noise was made which attracted the attention of passers-by who had a look at our trade fair and listen to the music. Most stalls were made of materials skipped and recycled from the streets and with posters taken from this year's elections. The second action of the day was a really lively parade along the main streets, with singing, stilt-walkers, jugglers, puppets, the Plasti-

saurus and the glass factory occupying the streets and entering into the Stock Exchange, the Banco de Montevideo (to the surprise of the staff) and passing in front of the Ministry of Housing & the Environment and McDonald's, where we stayed for a while singing and getting in the way. The day finished with a puppet show about the media, which ended up with the burning of a cardboard television.

Bouncing All the Way to the Banks

Czech J18 actions started on a hot Saturday afternoon, on May 22, with the first street party outside Prague taking place in Brno with over 800 people, a sound system, bands and infoshops. At about 5.00 pm the crowd took to the streets, blocking traffic in town and marching through Brno without any arrests.

On June 5 there was the third Prague street party. The date was set to welcome the Intercontinental Caravan. It was another hot day with some 7000 gathered in the centre of Prague. There were seven mobile sound systems and live concerts with ska and punk bands, a lot of infoshops, veggie food, diy-culture, drummers, tearoom, fire show and much, much more.

After the 'official' event ended, people joined the protest →



← march which was lively but proceeded through the centre without incident, apart from traffic chaos, until reaching the Old Town district. At the bottom of Petrin Hill people headed to the us embassy. The police

nationalist Ken Saro-Wiwa.

By 10.30 am the plane conveying Owens from Lagos landed. On hand to receive him at the airport were activists, workers, women, children, the unemployed, market women

For example, last April soldiers on the orders of Agip shot eight villagers, including a two-year-old baby.

The demonstrators also blockaded the gates leading to the offices of Shell in Port Harcourt. The blockade lasted for about two hours and solidarity messages were presented by representatives of virtually all the ethnic nationalities in Niger Delta and groups with transnational agenda like the National Association of Nigerian Students. There was dancing and singing in the streets, bringing Port Harcourt, Nigeria's petroleum capital, to a standstill.

Earlier the convoy had gone to 24 Aggrey Road, Port Harcourt, which the late Saro-Wiwa had donated to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (mosop) to use as its office. Addressing the gathering at Aggrey Road, Owens Wiwa pointed out that all those who had a hand in the murder of the Ogoni Nine will be punished sooner rather than later. Orono Douglas bemoaned the fate of the suffering peoples of the Niger Delta in the hands of corporations and said "enough is enough". Dr Akobo encouraged the peoples of the Delta to continue to fight for their liberation from native colonialists and global forces of injustice as "we are in the age of freedom". He encouraged all peoples of the Delta to unite as one, to defeat their common enemies.

Gujrat, Pakistan

Trade unionists held a massive rally. The leadership of APFUTU, a union federation, had gone underground on June 14. They came out on June 18 wearing masks and veils and joined the rally, in spite of the fact that the local police were everywhere ready to arrest them. The police had made a night raid two nights before at the union house as well as Imtiaz Labor Hall on the midnight of June 17 and 18, trying to find out about the leadership. When police failed they smashed up the office and looted a computer and other equipment.

They also burned records.

When the underground leadership appeared in the procession, the protesters broke through the police lines and went to the Chowk District Courts chanting slogans against the government as well as the nuclear tests. In front of Deputy Commissioner Office the APFUTU (Women's Wing) leadership were on hunger strike as a protest against the nuclear explosions.

Afterwards a protest gathering was held at the District Court Chowk and Mr Pirzada Imtiaz Syed, Secretary General, addressed the meeting but about 300 to 400 police commandos attacked the demonstration, men women and children, with tear gas. They arrested Pirzada, a number of other leading figures and 50 more active members.

On July 9, the 50 rank-and-file members were bailed and released and two days later all but six were too. Those released had been tortured. The Pakistani trade unionists have called for international financial and political support and have opened two bank accounts in the name of 'International Solidarity Fund of APFUTU' with the Allied Bank of Pakistan Ltd, main branch Gujrat. The details of bank accounts are: International Solidarity Fund of APFUTU, Account No: 1180 (US \$) and 1181 (DM) Name of bank: Allied Bank of Pakistan Ltd, Main Branch, Chowk Nawabsahib, Gujrat (Pakistan). All Pakistan Federation of United Trade Unions (APFUTU), Union House, Rang Pura, Sargodha Road, Gujrat - 50700 (Pakistan) Fax number (+ 92 4331) 52 53 02.

Since June 18 there have been a total of around 50 arrests. Expect a 'grass-*em-up*' media campaign sooner or later. Legal Defence and Monitoring Group are trying to coordinate defence but need more people to get involved. Contact them at BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX. Three people are on remand, one is Onofrio Loverso [Fonzie], write to him at B Wing, HMP Rochester, 1 Fort Road, Rochester, Kent. ■

The damage assessors list is endless and in the eurovision rioting stakes London was in at Number One for the first time in years

were badly-organised despite having deployed 1000 cops, two helicopters, waterguns, horses, etc. The now-angry crowd attacked the building with bottles and stones, breaking many windows. The police arrived, but let the crowd move on to the castle.

After a rest, about 500 people walked from the castle back to the centre but riot police were much in evidence at this time. People tried to attack McDonald's, KFC, and a TV station... police arrested 114 people, nine cops were injured - two badly - a McDonald's was demolished, a police station and a few cars were left with broken windows. Pity they got the date wrong really.

Niger Delta, Nigeria

About 10,000 people from all across Nigeria and the Niger Delta, ethnic nations in particular, joined protesters around the world. Thousands of people from all walks of life gathered at the Port Harcourt International Airport to meet Dr Owens Wiwa, younger brother of the slain Ogoni

and professionals including former minister Dr Mofia Akobo who heads the Southern Minorities Movement; Mr Orono Douglas, environmental human rights lawyer and leader of the Chikoko Movement; as well as Mrs Joi Yowika, the Ogoni lawyer who helped secure the release of the Ogoni Twenty among others.

Owens spoke to express his optimism that the peoples of the Niger Delta would overcome in their struggle against the alliance between the Nigerian state and Western multinational oil companies like Shell, Agip, Mobil, Chevron and Elf. These companies, many in the Delta say, have destroyed the basis of their livelihood. The crowd then moved in a convoy to Agip junction in Port Harcourt where a street named after General Abacha was unofficially re-named after Ken Saro-Wiwa as the old signpost was pulled out. The crowd also stormed Agip offices in Port Harcourt where two mock coffins were deposited in protest against the human rights violations of the Italian company.

Behind

THE HEADLINES in Dover

After a fight in a fairground on the weekend of the August 14 – 15, when 15 people were injured the police made a show of force with “chief officers warning residents and asylum seekers that violence will not be tolerated from anyone.” This is an apparent change from a policy where police had only intervened to protect racists.

There were rumours of yet another attempt by the NF to march or at least try a paper-sale on August 21. On the 19th they distributed leaflets door-to-door in the Buckland area. The leaflet attacked asylum seekers and Refugee Link, a local group which supports them, or as the NF have it “actively supports the programme of filling Britain with scrounging ‘ASYLUM SEEKERS’”. It ends saying that the NF will march again in Dover soon. On the Saturday, a few local anti-fascists went out looking for NF activity but just ended up being searched by the cops. Meanwhile in the ‘riot-torn’ seaside town everyone else went about their business quietly.

The following week the NF were out again leafleting, saying they would march from Dover Priory Station on Saturday 28 August. The local council applied for a ban on all marches – racist or in solidarity with asylum seekers – for three months. The NF backed down, adopting their law-abiding citizen image and saying they did not want confrontation with the police or anti-fascists! This is the highest-profile use of a ban on marches on the British mainland for years and allowed Straw to look like a moderate mediator rather than one of the protagonists.

From the start it should be pointed out that the violence in Dover has not been confined to attacks on or by asylum seekers and plenty of British

people in Dover have made a stand against racism and bigotry. Only a few weeks before the ‘tinderbox’ erupted a British Asian woman was attacked when she went to the aid of an asylum seeker. The police did nothing except to protect the pub that sheltered the racists.

This was only one of a series of incidents that have taken place, stirred up by racists in the press and government. These have been reported but only in anti-racist publications like *CARF*. There was no sudden explosion of violence and certainly no race riot.

Tough on Shitting in Doorways, Tough on the Causes of Shitting in Doorways

Scum like Nick Hudson of the *Dover Echo*, Jack Straw and the late lamented Mike O’Brien masquerade as bona-fide journalists or politicians, but in reality they think there is nothing wrong with plastering their racist shit over newspapers and airwaves. Lord Bassam, ex-Brighton squatter turned pompous council leader, is competing with Anne Widdecombe and outgunning his own boss Barbara Roche, for column space, but this is more than just a summertime opportunist playing of the race card.

Straw’s Asylum & Immigration Bill took a brief knocking over its welfare provisions. Removing any access to benefits for asylum seekers, replacing it with a ‘Voucher Tsar’, voucher appeals system and voucher cops, will cost everyone, except Tesco’s, a lot of money. The government admit that it will cost a lot more than just paying benefits directly. Straw argues that by keeping asylum seekers below the poverty line they will not come here in the first place. These fewer applications could then

be dealt with more quickly and cheaply. Less money would be spent on vouchers, and Immigration Service jobs could be cut too. However for most people the decision to leave their country and come here is not based on the attractions of the JSA or even citizenship classes for their children. Death squads in Columbia or Algeria, Taliban militiamen in Afghanistan, and Czech Nazis spend very little, if any, time assessing the likely impact of their actions on British Home Office spending projections. Until recently Straw appeared too dumb to realise this or too cynical to care. As Widdecombe emerged as the heroine of middle-England, Straw started spinning a slightly different line. He admitted that the number of applications was dependent on conditions in countries such as Afghanistan or Somalia, realising that with opposition from the parliamentary right he now had the opportunity to get the liberal left back on-board.

The root of the perceived problems in Dover and Kent is that asylum seekers are

for most people, the decision to leave their country and come here is not based on the attractions of the JSA

dependent financially on local authorities. Those who claim asylum, after going through immigration control, have no access to the reduced benefits available to port applicants. Many come in on the backs of lorries or other clandestine methods such as bent EU passports and apply for asylum in Kent, soon after arrival. Excluded from benefits, they become the responsibility of the Kent local authority.

The government proposals would make support the responsibility of central government using franchised agencies such as Housing Associations, local social services, quangos and doubtless some enthusiastic entrepreneurs.

The events in Dover allow Straw to act now to force dispersal at local authority expense. Anyone who resists will be responsible for ‘race riots’ in Dover. Then a centrally-administered voucher scheme will appear to promise beneficial change as opposed to the sick chaos that will ensue. This is not conspiracy, this is good news management. ■

**Kosovans arrive at East Midland Airport in May.
If they’d come through Dover, they’d have been tear-gassed.**



Drugs & Guns

There have been 26 shooting incidents in Harlesden in the last year. Six recent killings connected to 'Yardie' infighting have included those of Henry 'Junjo' Lawes and Dean Roberts.

Harlesden has more than its fair share of crack and of young men desperate enough to sell rock to other young men who want to escape, if only for fifteen minutes. Most people here though just want to live their lives; second and third generation Irish and Afro-Caribbean couples getting by as best they can.

Most of the shootings have involved small time criminals in turf wars over drug spots and security rackets posing no threat to anyone outside the circles of those directly involved. A combination of media hype, paramilitary policing and council cuts in local services have contributed to a sense of crisis – street crime is really the icing on the cake – working class communities turning in on themselves. On Saturday 19th June the Nation of Islam (NoI) held a rally in Harlesden town centre. Over 100 turned out for it, demanding simply, "Stop the Killing", "Gunmen Get Out", "To Shoot Your Brother Is Suicide." The Black United Front, a community-based coalition, held another rally later in July. The NoI has begun to organise 'Black Watch' patrols in Harlesden.

The NoI mixes an apocalyptic version of Islam with an orientation to the self-pride of minority urban communities. (But hard luck if your community happens to be Jewish or, god forbid, gay!). It is riddled with contradictions – black pride mixed with anti-Semitism and sectarian theology. But this mattered little on June 19. The demonstrators were 95% black. Junjo Lawes was killed on the 14th. Five people had been

shot in the preceding weeks. People had been afraid. For an hour or so, grouped together by the clocktower, that fear was gone, replaced by a new sense of community and a sense that the lives lost had some value, that the families mourning mattered, that people in NW10 mattered, if only to ourselves. A sense also that something could be done.

Mike Marqusee points to the basis for the NoI's presence within poor ghetto black communities. "The Nation grew within and against the culture of the ghetto. It set itself up as a counter-attraction to all the

shootings is that they're entirely about 'Yardie' gangs battling for turf, crimes imported from Jamaica. All of this of course allows New Labour the chance to play the race card, and the police an opportunity to step up their presence with community consent. There are two big holes in the 'Yardie' argument, though. One, it pretends that crime, battles for drug turf and the market for hard drugs are peculiar to the 'Yardie' gangs and the community around them. Two, it denies the role of the police in perpetuating the idea of 'Yardie' crime. The recent trial

It is, precisely because crime becomes something that the poor do to each other, that those of us who believe in working class self-organisation cannot afford to ignore it.

temptations of ghetto life: drugs gambling, prostitution, prize fighting." The Left in NW10 tell us that all our ills will be cured by the abolition of capitalism, in much the same way that temperance societies used to tell us that all our problems were down to drink. New Labour has declared war on the poor and a vacuum now exists as the local labour movement decays. In Harlesden, that vacuum has been, at least temporarily, filled by the NoI. If we want to contest that space and build a movement committed to the self-determination of working class communities, we have first to understand why so many people looked at the NoI demo and said "At least someone's trying to do something."

Crime is endemic to capitalism, a fairground mirror distortion of the social relations engendered by capital. One of the myths being spun by both police and politicians about the

of Yardie informer Eaton Green revealed that officers of the Drug-Related Violence & Intelligence Unit ran Green and protected him while he carried out a spate of armed robberies in the UK, even allowing him to bring two accomplices, Cecil and Rohan Thomas into the UK. From 1994 they also ran Delroy Denton, who raped and murdered Marcia Lawes in Brixton, and was shielded from both, crime squad and immigration attention, by his handlers, PC Steve Barker and immigration officer Brian Fotheringham. Roy Ramm, former head of the Met's Yardie Squad, has stated that "I'm absolutely convinced that there is no such thing as a black mafia or black Godfather operating in this country" and described the Yardie gangs as opting for a "little and often" method of importation rather than any large scale drug smuggling operation.

The government is set on

redistributing resources from welfare into the pockets of the upper middle class. New Labour want the social consequences of this to be confined to working class areas. Policing becomes containment, making sure the poor prey only on the poor. The notion of 'Yardie' crime as a distinct phenomenon allows us the illusion that such policing is "for our own protection."

The Guardian's Nick Hopkins and *The Observer's* Tony Thompson have worked particularly hard on behalf of Scotland Yard's 'Operation Trident' to perpetuate the myths about Yardie crime. Thompson, in a recent *Observer* piece described an interviewee, purportedly of St Mary's Road NW10, fearfully crossing the street to a butcher's shop on the other side, scared, "of being hit by a stray bullet." There has only ever been one shooting incident in St Mary's Road, and there's no butcher's there either, but as Thompson's interview was a fabrication that's no surprise. Nick Hopkins' piece *Turf Wars* (8/7/99) paints a vivid picture of a Yardie war with uzis and Ingram Mach 10s the weapons of choice. In fact these weapons weren't used in the majority of shootings, and the majority of those killed were UK nationals. There is no evidence of the involvement of any of the gangs he named.

It is, precisely because crime thus becomes something that the poor do to each other, that those of us who believe in working class self-organisation cannot afford to ignore it. Working class crime really is a problem for the working class. The criminologists John Lea and Jock Young state the core issues; "It is vital to realise the contradictory nature of working class crime ... Its cause is righteous, its direction individualistic. The political energies that could have been harnessed for a transformation of society become channelled into ensuring its inertia."

But what can be done? In his book *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin tackles the iss-

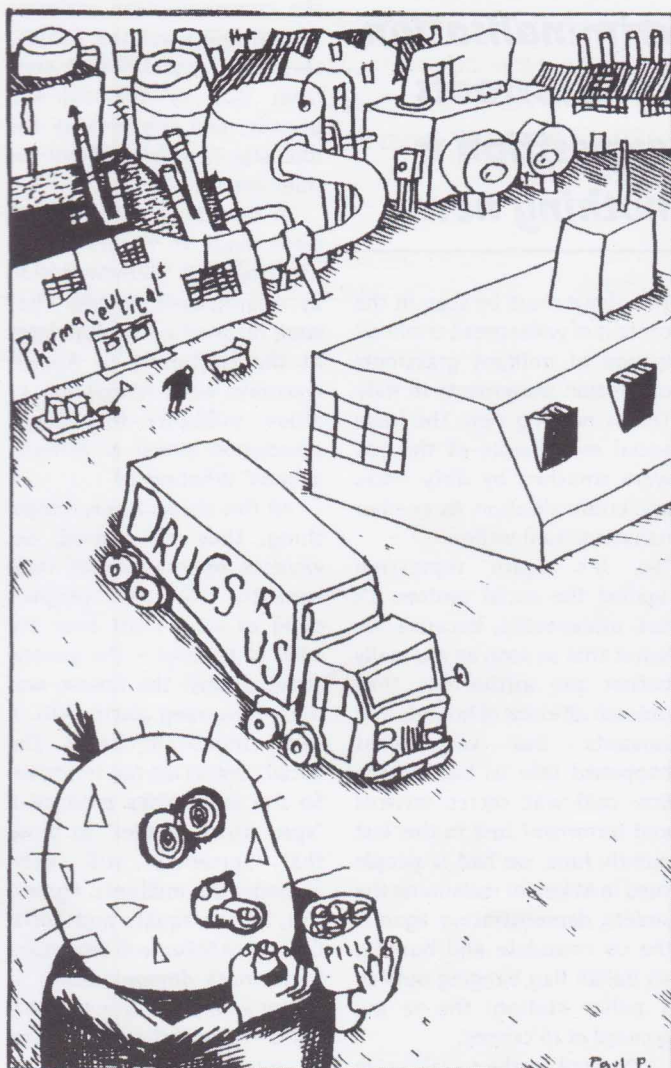
ues around drugs and crime head on. As he puts it, "Only the community can stop drug trafficking, it is our responsibility, however you look at it." The strategy advanced is based on establishing a combination of street counselling and education, street clinics and community action against dealers (ranging from exposing them to driving them out).

The only way ultimately to tackle crime in working class communities is by replacing it with politics – by rebuilding community solidarity and self-organisation such that crime is no longer seen as the only survival option. In doing so, we have one clear lesson to learn from the Nol. The Left's orientation to the state has left it exposed in areas like Harlesden where the state is the main landlord and a primary employer.

In the us, much of the urban

credibility of the Nol was based on the success of its "dope-busting" patrols, which gave those living in crack-infested blocks an alternative to a state which used crime as an excuse to criminalise whole communities, and gave local kids a chance to feel as if they could take control of their lives. As one Chicago youth put it, "Police treat you like garbage. The Muslims treat you with respect, and the way they come to us is the way we come back to them." (*Chicago Sun*, in *The Times* 13/2/94)

If we are not concerned with giving communities a sense of self-worth, of pride and respect, if we are not able to operate, as Mike Marqusee puts it, "within and against the culture of the ghetto", then our politics will be irrelevant to the communities we purport to address, and the chance to rebuild working class solidarity will be lost. ■



STUPID SEASON

After looting the City the on June 18, anarchists went to Penzance in Cornwall to take advantage of the eclipse to loot pastie shops and liberate fish – or so *The Express* and *Telegraph* would have you believe.

A couple of weeks after June 18, *The Cornishman*, the West Cornwall paper, claimed to have received a fax announcing an Anarchist Jamboree in Penzance on the Monday before the Eclipse. None of the local activists admitted to having any idea about this one. A few weeks later *The Telegraph* and *Express* took up the story – claiming that leaflets had been handed out at J18 in the city. A few calls round the most anal leaflet collectors we know didn't produce a copy of this leaflet but that doesn't mean that the papers were lying.

The Cornishman announced that fly-posters for the day of chaos had appeared in town but these mysteriously disappeared before anyone else saw them. Come August 9, Penzance had 100 extra cops waiting to pounce but no Jamboree. Learning from their London colleagues rashness, Cornish Police didn't announce at 8.30 am that it was all going very well. But they could have done as, surprisingly, nothing happened.

The anarchist menace was still to be averted as apparently there had been threats to sacred sites; specifically to paint a circular stone with a hole in it white – like a Polo! Amazingly, this didn't happen either but probably only due to the commitment of local pagan groups who had undertaken guard duty.

The Express had to limit its anarchist horror stories to reporting an attack on a festival by police where children were cs-gassed in an attempt to seize a sound system. Not particularly near Penzance, nor on August 9.

So what was all that about? Either it was a rare example of journalists making up stories to fill space or it was a deliberate move to help the authorities scare people off from coming to Cornwall and be ready to blame anarchists for any chaos that might happen.

121 EVICTED

After 18 years of occupation the 121 squatted centre in Brixton, London, was evicted on August 12.

Armed police, 150 riot cops and a helicopter were used. Railton Road and surrounding streets were sealed off and the bailiffs smashed their way in. There were seven people inside and faced with those odds resistance would have been futile. The centre had been occupied for 210 days since the council had gained a possession order in court and two months later the bailiffs and cops had been faced down on Railton Road. 121 will now be turned into something of benefit to the community such as private flats.

Squatting in Lambeth will continue as will resistance to gentrification. 121 was a base for masses of different actions and activities, groups and individuals over the years. The court case and initial resistance brought people together again.



Action Report Indonesia

by *Front Anti-Fascist (FAF)
in Bandung*

On May 21 (the anniversary of Suharto's fall from power) FAF and other resistance organisations demonstrated against the military's dual function, the next fake election and for real transitional government. The rally was 500-strong, consisting of students, labourers, farmers, slum-dwellers and local punks. Riot police attacked the peaceful protest, resulting in three injuries.

One of the aims was to show that the June election is just more bullshit because the military and the status quo will still exist, continuing their oppression. It's difficult for us right now because the masses are taken-in by election hype; they still haven't come down from their initial euphoria.

Similar demonstrations also took place in other cities like Jakarta, Solo, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Lampung, and Padang, causing differing levels of chaos. The biggest was in Jakarta where 75 people were injured and hundreds jailed.

Right now, Indonesia is in election campaign mode. Most people believe that the election will improve our ever-worsening conditions. They don't realise that whoever wins, the regime is guaranteed 34% of the seats by law. People are still being killed in Aceh, Timor and Papua. Bloodshed is still everywhere. We will keep the campaign going and bring ever more people into the insurrectionary movement. We're waiting patiently with clenched fists.

Below is our address – we'd welcome literature or anything else helpful. Please write nothing but the address on envelopes to avoid censorship.
*PO Box 1853, Bandung 40018,
West Java, Indonesia*

Repression, Resistance & Dirty Tricks in Italy

In Bologna a squatted anarchist centre (Laboratoria Anarchico Paglietta) was evicted on May 25. Inside Andrea and Sara were sleeping. The police, together with the media, were looking for Andrea, a well-known anarchist. Luckily he escaped through a hidden hole behind a wardrobe. Sara was arrested for obstructing the police, put into jail and then, being pregnant, placed under house arrest.

All of this started because a DS office in Bologna had been burned during the war. DS is Italy's left party in power. Almost 30 offices had been burned all over Italy during the war. In the squat the police had found a poster signed 'Individualita Anarchiche', a name used to sign posters in Italy for years, but in Bologna some military tanks had been burned some months ago, and a flyer left at the scene was signed 'Individualita Anarchiche'.

So, using this as ammunition, the police dreamed up a conspiracy involving 18 people. There were about 30 raids around Bologna, seven warrants were issued and eleven people were told to report to police stations daily. 16 of the 18 suspects went into hiding, as they realised what was going on. Only a guy named Tommaso was put into jail, and Sara was found at her home. Her charge is no longer "obstructing the police", but "forming a subversive organisation", which is a really serious accusation in Italy.

After a month or so there was a successful application to the 'Court of Justice' as there was no proof to back up the charges. The 18 people have now been freed on remand, but charges have not been dropped. The accusations are of squatting different places, flyposting,

creating a disturbance in a square and a theft – not burning DS offices or tanks! The activists had already been charged for the former and were awaiting sentences. So the 'subversive organisation' was only an invention to allow a heavier sentences. In the past few years we have seen the 'ORAI' conspiracy, [see *BF* 206 and onwards] the 'Gray Wolves' in Val Di Susa [*BF* 215] and now this. The first didn't work, the second managed to kill Edo and Sole. Don't let them get away with this one. *Innsbruck ABC*

criminalisation of grassroots opposition is nothing new

The above must be seen in the context of widespread criminalisation of militant grassroots opposition movements in Italy. This is nothing new. The huge social movements of the 70s were smashed by dirty tricks and criminalisation. As another Italian militant writes:

"So, it's again repression against the social centres. It's not unexpected, because we learnt that as soon as you really bother the authorities they unleash all kinds of hounds and servants. But will what happened take us back to the 80s: cold war, secret services and terrorism? Just in this last month, June, we had 12 people sued in Milan for reclaiming the streets, demonstrating against the US consulate and burning an Italian flag hanging outside a police station: the 12 are accused of 16 'crimes'.

On April 25, the social centre

'Askatasuna' in Turin was completely smashed by a dirty squad of anti-riot police. The Mayor of Milan declared that in the grassroots trade unions which promoted the general strike against the Kosovo war, involving more than one million workers, there are "signs of terrorist committees".

Interrogated later by the police, the Major could not specify the name of a single terrorist.

Mr D'Antona, a shy and dutiful bureaucrat working for the Ministry of Labour, was killed in Rome by a supposed 'Red Brigade' group. Analysis of the communication claiming responsibility for the murder reveals a very different style from that of the old Red Brigade, and the famous five tops star is different from the traditional one.

In late July, seven arrests were made in Naples for an unauthorised demonstration by unemployed people. They were released a few days later. At the beginning of August warrants were issued for 40 Milan militants for "illegal association aimed at terrorist actions". What next?

All this shows a very simple thing: they are scared. So, whoever opposes power from beneath, from the people's point of view, must bear the label of terrorist – the general strike against the Kosovo war must have rang alarm bells in many important heads. The Social Centres are not terrorists. So the authorities produce a "spectacular murder" to prove that terrorists still exist amongst the militants. Against this, all the squats and Social Centres in Milan will organise a large mass demonstration in September, possibly a national demo – peaceful, colourful and as united as possible. ■

The Invisible War

In 1990, us Secretary of State James Baker told Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz that if Iraq did not comply with us demands,

"we will reduce you to the pre-industrial age".

Nine years on, that objective has not changed.

The us and Britain have launched more than 200 multi-missile air strikes against Iraq since January, following the Operation Desert Fox assaults. Almost completely ignored by the media, these raids have led to at least 80 deaths and hundreds of injuries.

Us Secretary of Defence William Cohen has claimed the raids are in 'self defence', but the us have re-written the rules of engagement to such a degree that us aggression can be justified in any circumstances at any time. Us pilots can choose to attack whenever they 'believe' Iraq has threatened air patrols or violated the no-fly zones. 'Retaliatory' targets can be chosen from a list of pre-selected sites, which need have no link with the site of the purported transgression. Targets can be hit long after the 'danger' is over. On 18 July, for example, a us bombing raid targeted a car park at Najaf in southern Iraq, leaving 14 civilians dead and 35 injured. (Strangely, the us noted no Iraqi violations in the build-up to the launch of the air war against Yugoslavia).

Large numbers of Iraqi people continue to be affected by the extensive deployment of depleted uranium ammunition during the Gulf War. Professor Siegwart-Horst Gunther has described the effects of du material following research carried out in Iraq as:

1 "A considerable increase in infectious diseases caused by the most severe immunodeficiencies in a great part of the population.

- 2 Frequent occurrence of massive herpes and zoster afflictions, also in children.
- 3 Aids-like syndromes.
- 4 A hitherto unknown syndrome caused by renal and hepatic dysfunction's.
- 5 Leukaemia, aplastic anaemia and malignant neoplasms
- 6 Congenital deformities caused by genetic defects, which are also to be found in animals."

The us and uk Defence Departments are attempting to suppress details of the effects of du on Gulf veterans. The clinical chief of the Department of Nuclear Medicine of the us Veterans Administration, Dr Asaf Durakovic, was sacked after diagnosing du contamination in some 24 Gulf veterans sent to see him. In December 1998, the Ministry of Defence raided the homes of two British Gulf veterans after they obtained documents showing that the mod was carrying out research on the effects of du contamination of Gulf War returnees.

UN-imposed sanctions meanwhile lead to the deaths of 6000 Iraqi children each month. Iraq is not able to buy medication, repair its infrastructure or maintain basic health services. The us and uk purportedly displayed humanitarian concern for the Iraqi people when they agreed to increase the amount of oil Iraq could export under the oil-for-

food arrangement to \$5.2 billion every 6 months. But Operation Desert Fox targeted the oil industry and it barely pumps \$2 billion every 6 months. Forty percent of oil profits are directed to the UN, as reparations and to meet UNSCOM costs. "Sanctions", as Tariq Aziz has declared, "are genocide."

The notion that the us's main concern is "democracy" is laughable. Prior to its incursion into Kuwait, Iraq was a us client state. Iraq is a "threat to peace and stability" because it is a major oil producer which, unlike Saudi Arabia or Kuwait,

clings to a belief in its right to self-determination. Last year, the us congress passed the Iraqi Liberation Act, making \$97 million available for "lethal and non-lethal aid" to opposition groups deemed "eligible" (pro-us). As Middle East International noted, "the Americans are effectively trying to hand pick Iraq's future rulers and lay down the line for them in policy terms".

The ongoing genocide against the people of Iraq has been ignored by the mainstream media. We have a duty to break the silence. ■



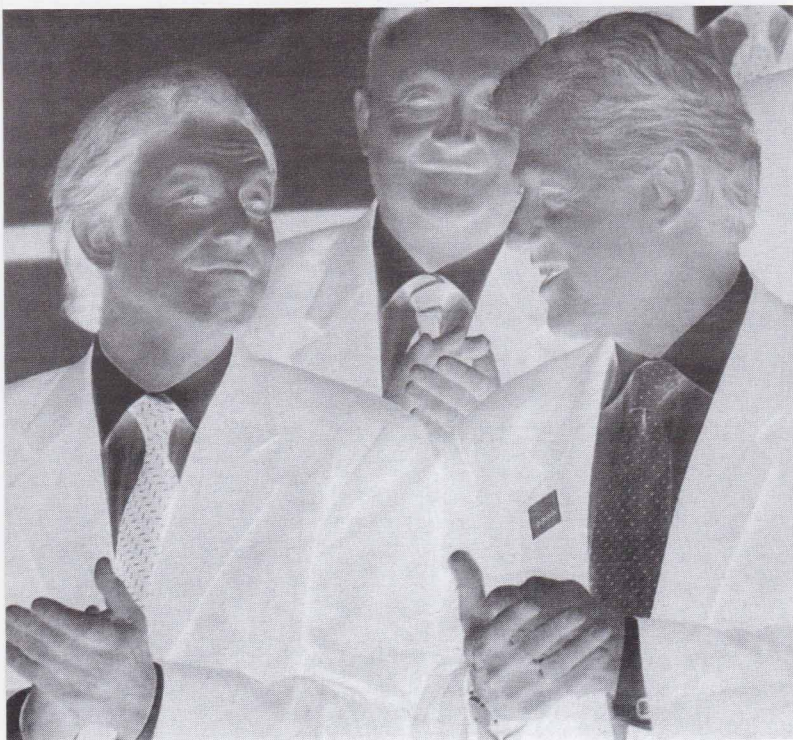
A New Internationalism

On Friday 30 July those 'saviours' of the Balkans, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, arrived in Sarajevo to hold a press conference where they revealed their agenda for the 'reconstruction' of the region. Anyone still clinging to the notion that NATO bombarded the people of Yugoslavia out of humanitarian concerns for the Kosovar Albanians will have found little cause to retain such delusions after the Bill & Tony Show laid out their wares.

NATO's agenda for the Balkans; "Balkan countries that build democracy and market economies will be embraced by Europe and NATO – but Serbia will stay in the cold until it gets rid of Slobodan Milosevic."

NATO's commitment to a humanitarian agenda always rang hollow. Tony Blair talked of a "new internationalism where

the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated." Meanwhile NATO, despite warnings that air strikes would lead to massive displacement of refugees, proceeded with a course of action which left 670,000 Kosovans in Albania and Macedonia, 70,000 in Monte-negro and 75,000 outside the region altogether.



When the KLA tried to reach refugees displaced within Kosovo, NATO refused to provide air cover. When Serb gun emplacements shelled refugees it stood back and watched. One could be forgiven for thinking that, far from being an unfortunate consequence of facing down Serb aggression, the mass movement of refugees was a consequence NATO actively embraced.

And if, as is now admitted, the agenda was to secure market economies in the region, and the prospect of a bloody civil war in Kosovo was a clear obstacle to such aims, then indeed it makes sense to engender such displacement. The desired results were the aerial suppression of Milosevic, the weakening of the KLA by a) the dispersal of its communities of support and, b) its disarmament and the filling of the resulting control vacuum by K-For troops to facilitate the restoration of stability on NATO terms.

It is clear enough that the Kosovar Albanians elicited little "moral concern" in Washington or Whitehall when Yugoslav tanks rolled in to deny them a taste of democracy in 1989. In February 1998 the US condemned the KLA as "without any question, a terrorist group." This statement gave Milosevic the green light to step up his ethnic cleansing programme in the region. At the EU General Affairs Council Meeting on 8 December 1998, with Milosevic's brutality a matter of public record, the GAC expressed its concern at the "intensification of military action" but pinned the blame on "increased activity by the RZIA." Having set the trap, all NATO had to do was wait for Milosevic to blunder in.

At the Rambouillet talks, the sole obstacle to a settlement was Yugoslavia's refusal to sign a deal which would tie them to a process whereby "a purely NATO force was to be given full permission to go any where it wanted in Yugoslavia, immune from any legal process" (*New York Times*). Rejecting the Rambouillet deal, the Serbian National Assembly called on the OSCE and UN to facilitate a peaceful diplomatic settlement (in terms not dissimilar to those presented by NATO subsequently as a 'victory').

Washington simply gave Milosevic the go-ahead to suppress the KLA, then used his actions as a basis to threaten war in the region. When the Serbs indicated their willingness to negotiate, albeit under duress, they were faced with an ultimatum that abused their national sovereignty to such degree that it was clear to all parties that they could not accept it. War was presented by NATO as a fait accompli, in the clear knowledge that such conflict would lead directly to the displacement and murder of the Kosovar Albanian community.

Not quite the picture the media sold us; "Milosevic's refusal to accept... or even discuss an international peace-keeping plan was what started NATO bombing on March 24", the *New York Times* tries to have it. The 'war' with Serbia was the end game of a strategy with one clear aim – the entrenchment of European and US capital in the Balkans. As Doug Henwood has observed "It's no mere detail that Yugoslavia came under the tutelage of the IMF in the early 1950s, and the country borrowed heavily and disastrously. Over

the decades, the IMF promoted decentralisation, competition and a weakening of development policies that favoured poorer regions, and the promotion of market principles. In the 1970s, market liberalisation and nationalism went hand in hand; for example, Croatian nationalists demanded to keep their foreign exchange earnings." (*Left Business Observer*, April 1999).

Peter Gowan, (whose book *The Global Gamble*, Verso 1999, is one of the most comprehensive investigations of the aims and methods of American expansionism available), comments that "the Western powers, by their deliberate acts of commission and omission, played a central role in creating the conditions in which barbaric acts were bound to flourish." (*New Left Review* 234). Gowan contends that the logic behind the war, lay entirely with the strategic us/European interests of the NATO alliance. "Success would decisively consolidate us leadership in Europe. Success outside the framework of UN Security Council permission would ensure no collective security in Europe by the UN back door of a Russian veto. And it would seal the unity of the alliance against a background where the launch of the Euro – an event potentially of global political significance – could pull it apart." (ibid).

So, with thousands dead, hundreds of thousands displaced, and the infrastructure of Kosovo and Yugoslavia destroyed, NATO has established a Kosovan protectorate on the same basis as that established in Bosnia under the Dayton agreement. The Kosovo Accord, like Dayton "is only binding on the Balkan parties to it, not on the international organisations which have appointed themselves to bring 'democracy' to the region. The Dayton Agreement was supposed to allow for a year of supervised transition. In 1997, the transitional international administration prolonged its own jurisdiction indefinitely. The High Representative has the authority to

impose economic sanctions at local or regional level on bodies which do not comply with his recommendations. He has the power to curtail or suspend any media network or programme which can be held to contravene "either the spirit or the letter of Dayton." As the Bosnian High Representative himself defines it "if you read Dayton carefully, it gives me the possibility to interpret my own authorities and powers."

David Chandler notes that "Far from facilitating autonomy, the transformation of the Dayton mandates has led to the creation of a us-run international protectorate in Bosnia. Compared with the vast international bureaucratic-military machine of around 50,000 international troops and administrators, the elected institutions have little capacity for policy making or implementation." (*New Left Review* 235). As for Bosnia, so too, under the terms of the Accord, for Kosovo.

In the run up to East Timor's ballot on independence, over 25% of the population were displaced by pro-Indonesian militias. Britain meanwhile has, since May 1997, approved 91 arms licences to Indonesia. Between 1990 and 1994 over one million Kurds were displaced by Turkish repression. Turkey is the single biggest importer of us military hardware, and is the world's largest arms purchaser. So much then, for that "new internationalism where the brutal repression of whole ethnic groups will no longer be tolerated." Still, as Bill Clinton put it on 23rd March, "If this domestic policy is going to work, we have to be free to pursue it. And if we're going to have a strong economic relationship that includes our ability to sell around the world, Europe has got to be a key. And if we want people to share our burdens of leadership with all the problems that will inevitably crop up, Europe needs to be our partner. Now, that's what this Kosovo thing is all about... it's about our values." (*Left Business Observer*, April 1999). ■

MAY DAY

in Medellin, Columbia

The police weren't feeling too friendly, and we gave them what they wanted – a volley of small fireworks...

It was all supposed to start at 8.30 am, but when we arrived we could already feel a heavy atmosphere building up as speech-making by local union bureaucrats held up the start of the march for at least an hour. In any case there was a real air of combativity: the young supporters of the CAP¹ (People's Armed Commandos) were all masked up, giving the march a wonderful sense of insurrection about it. From the start the police weren't feeling too friendly, and the CAP gave them what they wanted – a volley of small fireworks. Further along, passing the main police station, the bombardment intensified, stones were thrown as well. The atmosphere was really charged because a few blocks back the police had cordoned off a major department store – as if it belonged to them. Someone then had the brilliant idea of throwing incendiary devices at the buildings and stones at the windows of all the business premises. Clashes between the demonstrators and police became more frequent as the march continued, with police baton charges. The atmosphere of the last few days had fired people up; parliament was about to approve the so-called 'National Development Plan', which proposes 'fiscal austerity' to reduce state expenditure (while the president and his henchman take foreign holidays).

The clashes reached their climax at Berrio Park, where the march was supposed to end. Instead, there were continuous baton attacks (of which I had a taste), petards being thrown and happy tunes being sung to the police ("The police are also exploited, that's why they march alongside us!", "Murderers!", etc). Basically, a march that began with a festive atmosphere ended with who knows how many demonstrators injured, disappeared or even dead.

Now calm has returned – the autodefensas (the name the paramilitaries give themselves) groups kidnap, disappear and kill people; the guerrillas kidnap, make propaganda and strengthen their authoritarian military structure; the army is upset – more than half of its top brass resigned in solidarity with the Minister of Defence and then went back to work in exchange for who knows what perks; the president keeps travelling and has just come back from Canada etc.

Local press reports afterwards noted that the march followed a similar pattern to the last five years, that it was 'infiltrated' by 'rebellious young people' and that this time round 'the intense heat and length of the speeches at the start caused bad feeling among some demonstrators', resulting in 'unknown persons' disconnecting the sound system of the speakers and thus sabotaging the final rally.

Notes

¹ The CAP are a relatively new and independent urban militia group operating in the city who profess a Marxist-Leninist ideology and sympathy for the national guerrilla movement (FARC/ELN) while remaining outside their structures. They grew out of the generalised militias' movement of the 80s in poor neighbourhoods of Medellin, which span off in different directions in the 90s.

Southall Black Sisters are a black women's group that were formed in the late 70s and are still going strong today. They have campaigned tirelessly for the rights of women who fight back against domestic violence and more recently against creeping fundamentalism within Asian and other communities. SBS are not anarchists but we should have plenty to learn from their struggles and their courage over the last 20 years. We interviewed Hananna and Anita from SBS at their resource centre in Southall.

Why and how was Southall Black Sisters set up originally?

I wasn't around at the time, but SBS was set up by a group of Asian and African-Caribbean women, initially in response to racism and the problems black women were experiencing in the late 70s and early 80s. One of the earliest campaigns was against the virginity tests being imposed by immigration officers on Asian women arriving at Heathrow Airport to meet their British fiancés. Other work was around racial harassment and supporting strikers (in particular the Chix factory strike in 1980). In the early 1980s we started campaigning around violence against women when someone called Ms Dilu and her five daughters were set alight by her husband. He had set them on fire because she produced no sons. And later there was the death of Krishna Sharma who was an Asian woman who hung herself after years of violence from her husband. And although the verdict was suicide, we said she had been driven to this situation – it was murder in our minds. We demonstrated through the streets of Southall in protest at that death.

now we've established a centre that is quite solid in a sense in that it has a clear politics and direction. The establishment of a resource centre has meant that we are able to provide a 'service' to women. But we have never given up our campaigning and actions. Other groups, when they have got funding, have often dropped the campaigning side of their work. We think we have gained respect through our campaigns and have created change – some funders support that. Others don't and want you to be a charity (which we are not) which could preclude much of the work that we do at present.

Do you have paid workers only, or are other people involved?

We have four paid workers and do take on volunteers from time to time, when we can provide them with support. But much of the work, especially support group activities, demonstrations, public meetings etc. is carried out and organised by our membership and the women who have come to us for help in the past and now want to be involved politically and give something back. There is a strong



Southall Black Sisters

It was one of the first demonstrations in the country against domestic violence within Asian communities and it broke the silence around the issue.

Was it at that point that you decided to work as a women-only group?

No, that started in 1979 when we first established ourselves and the unity there had been formed around the issue of being black and anti-racism. But we recognised the need to look at women's issues as well at that stage because they weren't necessarily going to be addressed by the anti-racist movement or by the community. We wanted to deal with the issues raised by the deaths of local women.

The resource centre became a reality in around 1982, initially with GLC funding and later funding from the local council. It's always been under-resourced – but

political activism that we encourage amongst our clients and membership and it is important that they own the centre and that ultimately they run it and decide its direction. Unless women feel that way, you're not really progressing the empowerment or politicisation of women or women using their own experience to create change. Women really want to help others when they've found solutions in their own lives – they want to pass on their experience and many of them have joined the management committee – so my clients are also my bosses – it's that sort of relationship...

What sort of problems do women come to you with at SBS?

Largely domestic violence; rape, sexual abuse, mental abuse, physical violence, immigration problems... forced marriages

have become a big issue, abduction, sexual harassment, racism, housing issues, depression...

How do you deal with such diverse issues?

Well most of these problems are about domestic violence and the other issues are related to it. We often refer-out straight benefits or immigration problems, and concentrate on the domestic violence issues and support. We often simply give women the information and advice that they need to help themselves, rather than doing it all for them. We also get a lot of calls from women around the country which is difficult because we don't have the resources to deal with all of them. So we often have to refer them to agencies in their local area – but of course, there is nothing like SBS in their local area and often there is nowhere for them to go.



So what actual support would you provide to, say, a woman experiencing domestic violence and wanting to leave the abuser? Obviously you would tell her about her legal options, but would you also offer practical support as well?

Yes, we'd make sure she had somewhere to go – possibly a refuge, we'd make sure she could get there and would contact social services if, for example, she had no means of accessing benefits to pay for accommodation. We'd support her through ongoing matrimonial problems (eg. divorce) and any criminal proceedings. Often other issues then come up like immigration problems, childcare problems etc. And it's important that these issues are dealt with to prevent them from going back to violent situations because they could just give up.

Many risk being rejected by their families or communities for having challenged their husbands. They can be severely isolated and this is made worse by language problems, lack of skills and knowledge of what to do and where to go. Simple things like how to get from A to B. Many women we see have never been out

of Southall. Others have only just arrived in the UK. We have to help them with things they're not familiar with – the ultimate aim is that they become independent and able to handle these things themselves. A small scale example is if you are taking a woman to a solicitors firm, a woman who can't speak the language, throughout the journey, you point out where to get off, landmarks, etc. so she can do it herself next time. Support groups are vital in this process, they are run by long-term and ex-clients or other members of SBS, and also provide friendship networks.

SBS are well-known for their campaigns and actions around the one year rule¹ – can you tell us what the practical problems are for women trapped under this rule?

Well to put it simply, they have no rights! They face deportation because they do not have their permanent leave to stay. They have no recourse to public funds which means they cannot get social security benefits or public housing. They can't even get into a women's refuge half the time because they can't pay the rent. Many will

◀ Kiranjit Ahluwalia killed her husband in a final act of survival. She was sentenced to life for murder. As a result of the SBS campaign, her conviction was reduced to manslaughter and she was released.

decide to stay in a violent situation rather than face the risk of deportation or destitution. They are all relatively new to the country and many don't speak English.

There are also women whose husbands actually want them to be deported (because they don't want them anymore and want to take another wife) – they will tell the home office that the marriage has broken down and the woman will have no choice in the matter. Others may have been here for the requisite amount of time, but their husbands have hidden their passports or deliberately failed to tell them that they must apply for their indefinite leave to remain before the twelve months is up. Such women can be vulnerable to total strangers who offer them accommodation and 'help' but then exploit them. Luckier ones may have friends or relatives who will offer them refuge and financial support. We often have to beg women's refuges to take women trapped under this rule fleeing violence – but a lot of them still say no.

Women with children can sometimes get money and accommodation under the Children Act from social services, but single women have a much harder time accessing similar help under the National Assistance Act and we are at present fighting a judicial review case on this issue. It is clear that asylum seekers can get National Assistance Act help, but councils are far more reluctant to see it used to help women trapped under the one year rule. We hope to set a precedent in terms of local authority responsibilities in this court case.

There are further problems coming with the government's new act affecting asylum seekers – the Children Act and the National Assistance Act help may cease to be available to asylum seekers at all and people will be dispersed around the country. Asylum seeker women fleeing domestic violence will be even more isolated than they are now and won't get the support they need. We have already seen several local authorities attempting to send asylum seekers out of their areas and have seen the effects on women. Some women are fleeing violence abroad and this is the basis of their claim for asylum and they need specialist help. We think the new Act will be a major problem for the future for our work and for women. →

← We are already visiting women in detention centres and prisons, but we will have real problems visiting women dispersed around the country.

What about the new government proposals on the one year rule and women fleeing domestic violence?

Well there have been concessions, after we have argued and campaigned for a very long time, and of course we welcome

(rather than physical) abuse may have no legal remedies – so really a lot of women will fall outside these concessions. We have made our objections known, and the government have promised to monitor the situation but they won't even know about half the cases because women won't come forward and we are very angry about the situation. This concession simply won't help the women it is purportedly supposed to help.

You touched upon police attempts to avoid upsetting 'community leaders' earlier – can you tell us what has been the response from these 'leaders' to your work? Well, the community has been quite hostile to us and in the 1980s there was a concerted attempt to close us down. Community leaders petitioned against us and tried to get our funding stopped. We were called 'outsiders' and 'homewreckers' and were described as a 'conspiracy against the very fabric of Asian culture'. And there was a very real possibility that we would have closed down, had the women not fought hard for the survival of the centre.

Since then there has been a bit of a shift in attitudes. During the Kiranjit Ahluwalia campaign (see picture, page 15), we had more support from men in the community and even some community leaders began to pay lip service to the issue of domestic violence. Having said that, it's hard to know how deep this shift is, how genuine it is or whether it is simply politically expedient for them to say that domestic violence is not acceptable at this moment in time.

We did get a lot of support around the Kiranjit campaign. People had to ask themselves why was she driven to kill? Why didn't she leave him? What were the pressures on her? And these questions were put in a wider context in the sense that it was about other women who had killed, domestic violence in general and it created a national debate. And this debate had an impact in the Asian community, especially as it was inspired by an Asian woman and we were highlighting issues of domestic violence within this community. People said don't raise domestic violence because you are washing your dirty linen in public and it will create a racist backlash but we responded that we were talking about Sarah Thornton too, and about Emma Humphreys and other white women who had gone through similar experiences. Domestic violence is not confined to the ethnic minority communities.

Even the left, including the anti-racist left who didn't want us to expose this issue had to shift – they couldn't remain silent about it. And it's a shift that has been created by feminists, and in particular, black feminists who have worked to create these changes. But obviously there is a long, long way to go, and now we have the issue of fundamentalism to deal with, for example, and forced marriages and other culturally-harmful practices like female genital mutilation. And women dealing with these issues are facing a backlash from within their own communities and from the anti-racist left who say don't raise these issues because it makes the

them, but at the same time we are not satisfied, because the burden of proof is far too high. Women will have to produce an injunction, a conviction or a police caution to fall within the concession. If a woman can show such proof of violence from her spouse, within twelve months of entering the UK, she will, in theory, be given indefinite leave to remain and will not be deported.

But most women won't have such proof because, for a whole range of reasons, they don't pursue legal remedies. Many women won't get legal aid to pursue an injunction, especially if the violence occurred some time ago, or they've moved out of the area and there is no imminent danger; others don't want to go to the police because they still fear being deported, and have real fears around police racism. Often with minority communities, the police argue that such problems should be dealt with by the community themselves, that they are frightened of upsetting 'community leaders' and will avoid intervention at all costs in ethnic minority domestic violence cases.

Women who have undergone mental

There is a battle for the control of women's lives, young women's lives particularly, as they are on the front line in terms of their rights being attacked.

What is your attitude to the one year rule?

Well, of course, we want it abolished – but the politicians are worried about their racist electorate who would object to abolition as a part of immigration control. They abolished the primary purpose rule, which was the right thing to do, but we say that the one year rule does not actually serve much purpose even if you support immigration control. The vast majority of marriage applications are accepted. The one year rule simply serves to keep women in a vulnerable and dependent situation unnecessarily.



community look barbaric. Religious fundamentalism and a rise in orthodox and conservative ways of thinking amongst young men is becoming a big issue for us. Some young women are getting involved in this movement too. There is a battle for the control of women's lives, young women's lives particularly as they are on the front line in terms of their rights being attacked. In the North and the Midlands you have bounty hunters and networks of men who hunt down young women who have left home and return them to their families and this is part of the wider context of fundamentalism. It's not restricted to Islam, but is happening in all religions on an international level. In terms of our work, we are seeing women facing greater pressures to conform to traditional roles and values and an increase in forced marriages.

Some community leaders, for example the Muslim Parliament, say they oppose forced marriages but at the same time, their views are compromised by their religious values in that they view children born within forced marriages as illegitimate and this has severe consequences on the children who will face stigma within the community if they are considered to be illegitimate. There is a whole debate around religious identities which is infringing upon the women's movement, the black women's movement. Community leaders are looking at gender, and

are stating their opposition to domestic violence and forced marriages, but at the end of the day, who do they really help on the ground – do they actually give the support that women need at the time of crisis? No they don't – they didn't help Zoorah Shah (see insert below) when she asked. This is the real test.

SBS is a secular organisation and we have to hold onto these values – it means that women of all religions or no religion can come to us and religion is not used as a tool to oppress women. If your organisation has a religious identity then other women from other religious groups will not want to approach you, and equally women who are from the same religious background may be put off because their problem may stem from their religion. So we are totally committed to a secular environment at SBS.

SBS appear to be a lone voice speaking out publicly on these issues and are vocal in supporting women who fight back – some who have landed up in prison for doing so. Is this deliberate – your support for women who have made extreme choices, often challenging accepted behaviour within their communities and refusing to be victims?

It is important to emphasise that for many women there was no choice and to show why choices didn't exist – many women did try to seek help. Kuranjit's family told her to try again, the injunction that she

took out didn't work, she felt the police wouldn't help her. With Zoorah Shah she was a prostitute – she was prostituted – the man she killed was sexually abusing her, raping her, economically exploiting her, and was part of the criminal underworld himself and she did try to get help from his relatives, including his brother who was on the Council of Mosques – but because of her position she didn't get the support; she was condemned by that community and how do you escape that? How do you escape it? Suicide is the means by which a disproportionate number of Asian women escape such situations and Zoorah was, by that time, clinically depressed.

It is depressingly common for women who have become sex workers, whether through choice or by force, to find that no-one will help them when they are sexually abused – people make value judgements – she brought it upon herself etc. Was this the attitude in Zoorah's case?

Yes – she had to argue diminished responsibility in the end – men get away with pleading provocation or diminished responsibility when they kill their wives. Someone like Zoorah, she had gone through extreme abuse – abuse that few men go through – but the courts don't recognise this. Zoorah was raped in the cemetery where one of her children was buried – this was the level of abuse she suffered. In some respects the courts →

Zoorah Shah came to the UK following an arranged marriage. She was beaten by her husband and his family and forced to undergo abortions when they suspected she was carrying girls. Her husband's violence led to at least one miscarriage. Eventually he abandoned her and her three children: she was left homeless, destitute and unable to speak any English.

She was 'befriended' by a married man called Azam who provided accommodation and other 'help'. However this was at a price – he demanded sexual favours in return. He became violent when Zoorah refused to do his bidding and his abuse included forcing her to have sex in the cemetery where her children were buried. Azam was convicted of heroin dealing, but his abuse continued from prison as he tried to pimp Zoorah to inmates who were being released. Zoorah turned to Azam's brother (a prominent leader and head of Bradford Council of Mosques) and other community leaders for help, but they refused. In desperation she

turned to Azam's acquaintances in the Bradford criminal underworld but suffered further abuse at their hands. On Azam's release from prison, his abuse of her resumed and he forced her to have sex with other men. The turning point for Zoorah came when she suspected that he had designs on her daughters. She administered a dose of arsenic to Azam, and he died later that day in hospital.

Zoorah was charged with murder. She did not give evidence at her trial as she was too ashamed to reveal the details of her sexual history. She was sentenced to

life with a minimum tariff of 20 years. She has been in prison for six years.

In the last century, women in the West resorted to the use of poison to escape abusive relationships. Many were sentenced to hanging or life imprisonment since the stifling social mores of the time could not show an understanding of their experiences. In the USA, female slaves often resorted to the use of poison to escape rape and sexual abuse by their white masters. The use of poison by Zoorah was not the act of a 'cunning' woman driven by greed, but the desperate act of a woman unable to take control of her sexuality and life. The Bradford community is perhaps even more oppressive for Asian women than it was for women living in the nineteenth century. Many Asian women from northern England have been killed in recent times, for daring to break with the codes of their religion and culture.

Contact SBS or ABC for further details of Zoorah's case and how you can help.

Michael Tarnoky



← will recognise 'battered women syndrome' (not that we accept this definition, women don't kill because they are mad, they kill because they are angry too or acting in self-defence) but in Zoorah's case she didn't fit into the court's narrow ideas of a deserving victim. The courts have a view on acceptable behaviour for a woman and stereotypical images of how a passive Asian women should behave. Zoorah had a stain on her character – she was a prostitute – and therefore had no honour to preserve. So Zoorah's imprisonment was a racist as well as a sexist decision – she was punished for failing to conform to racist stereotypes.

What is happening with Zoorah's case at the moment?

Well, she lost her appeal and we are now trying to get her tariff reduced and waiting for a decision on this. We've got a campaign going to get the tariff reduced (contact sbs for further details) and are looking for further grounds of appeal.

Do sbs do a lot of prison work and how do women get in touch with you?

It is increasing – women find out about us from other inmates and some probation officers get in touch with us. There's not many Asian women in prison and those that are there are isolated and often want to contact an Asian women's group to help them. We would, of course, and do help with the cases of African-Caribbean women as well, but we have become, by default, identified as a group helping Asian women. The actual work normally starts with making sure that the women have legal representation and sometimes we would get more involved in the case and give a woman the support that she needs. We haven't been able to get involved with campaigning on prison conditions, but recently we dealt with a case where a woman went on hunger strike because of racism within the prison service. The hunger strike is now over because some of her demands were met. But generally speaking, our prison work is about supporting inmates, initiating campaigns, reducing their isolation and ensuring adequate legal representation.

Do sbs get involved in one to one support for prisoners, for example, visiting, letter writing etc.?

Not in a formal way, it would be a lot to organise, but women like Kuranjit have been invaluable in supporting other prisoners – and prisoners and ex-prisoners support each other.

How much faith do you have in the legal system – and how important do you think

legal reforms are, as opposed to practical support and direct action to deal with these issues?

The law is important in that it affects women's lives and dictates what you can and cannot do, rights and entitlements, but yes practical action is crucial, giving support to women, and making sure that women don't get turned away because it's assumed that forced marriages, for example, are a cultural practice that has to be respected and that the community should be allowed to resolve these problems themselves. Training and education to change social attitudes is part of the long-term aim and is crucial if anything is to change. Campaigning itself creates awareness and creates debate. All our campaigning is about creating long-term change so that we are not just about providing a service – we don't want to be an alternative social services! Unless you use your experience and what you've learned to create long-term change then all you're doing is helping individuals you're not helping the collective...

What can people do to help and what campaigns are important at the moment?

Support our campaigns and give us money! The important campaigns are, 1) forced marriages – if anyone has any information on forced marriages – please get in touch with us, 2) Zoorah Shah – support our efforts to get a reduction in her tariff, 3) the one year rule campaign – if anyone has got cases that don't fit within the concessions then we need to know about them too. ■

Notes

1 The one year rule covers people who come to the UK to live with their British spouse on the basis that their spouse will support and accommodate them without recourse to public funds. After 12 months, if they can show that they have lived together as man and wife and intend to continue doing so, they can apply to stay permanently in the UK. If the marriage breaks down before the 12 months is up, the non-British spouse can face deportation or destitution as they cannot access any state benefits or public housing. Sbs research between 1994 and 1995 showed that out of 755 women threatened with deportation because of marriage breakdown, 512 were fleeing domestic violence.

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In the week before he ruled that the Apprentice Boys could parade along the Ormeau Road in defiance of the wishes of the local community; Parades Commission Chair, Alistair Graham, had a meeting in Downing Street. Faced with an impasse in the peace process, caused by Loyalist intransigence, Tony Blair decided to reward their refusal to enter into dialogue by endorsing their right to sectarian triumphalism. The Republican movement's reward for their engagement in the peace process was to see nationalists batoned off the Ormeau Road. A spokesman for the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community said "The police were brutal. It was the worst I've ever seen. I'm relieved no one in my community is dead. I have never seen brutality like I saw from the RUC today." New Labour has clearly decided that the Orange veto will be, as always, preserved by force.

Much attention has focused on the death of RUC informer Charles Bennett, to the extent that Bennett's family has accused "certain political parties" of using his death as a "political football". The IRA have issued a statement that their cease-fire remains intact. Yet the press have homed in on the Bennett killing whilst totally ignoring the continuing sectarian attacks across the Six Counties, or the UDA's admission that its cease-fire is on "tenterhooks". In Belfast, the UDA has resumed targeting known republicans. The Portadown killing of Elizabeth O'Neill in a pipe bomb attack was barely acknowledged. Instead we have been fed stories of nationalist intransigence and the 'peaceful' nature of the Portadown District Orange Lodge's protests at Drumcree this year.

Breandan Mac Cionnaith, spokesperson for the Gavarghy Road Residents Coalition, has observed that, "Just like in 1997, the British Government is trying to implement another game plan that is going to see Orange marches forced through. For the benefit of Tony Blair and Alistair Graham, I give you this message: The Gavarghy Road is there. If you want to force an Orange march down it, try. Because we will resist inch by inch and millimetre by millimetre."

David Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Party have made it clear that they have no intention of sharing power with nationalists. Since Trimble entered negotiations in September 1997, he has done everything in his power to delay and frustrate the move towards, and subsequent implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Trimble is currently threatening the internet booksellers Amazon because of their distribution of Sean McPhilemy's book, *The Committee* (see review, *Black Flag* 217), wherein he is named by a

BIG HOUSE BIGOTRY

witness as a close associate of members of a Loyalist murder conspiracy which included Loyalist assassins Billy Wright and Robin Jackson.

In behaving like a true Orange bigot throughout the Stormont talks, Trimble has done no more than his constituency expected of him. In allowing the UUP to dictate the agenda, Blair has done what British Governments always do; underwritten the Unionist veto. The UUP's position of "no guns, no government" is outside the terms of the Good Friday Agreement they pretend to support. The Agreement requires only an electoral mandate as a precondition for executive office. All participants are required to work in good faith with the International Commission on arms decommissioning. As Gerry Adams has noted "The Good Friday Agreement was signed up to by a British government. It is British government policy. The British government have a responsibility to implement the agreement as negotiated, not in a manner demanded by the UUP, which is outside the terms of the agreement. There has been no movement on demilitarisation. There is no acceptable policing service. There is no human rights agenda. We do not have equality. All of these issues are

with the lives of the nationalist community when he can use them to sectarian advantage. The IRA has denied involvement with the deaths of McFerran and Bennett and no evidence linking them with either has been produced.

A recent survey in *The Irish Times* showed that 60% of the Unionist community still support the Good Friday Agreement, recognising that it could lead to "the creation of a partnership of mutual esteem between nationalism and unionism". Nevertheless, it is still the voice of Trimble, the stentorian bigotry of the Loyalist laager, which is assumed to speak for the Protestant people.

Four years ago we were told there was a new Unionism at large and when the likes of the Progressive Unionist Party's David Ervine said, "The politics of division see thousands of people dead, most of them working class," it was tempting to believe it. "We have been fools" he said, "Let us be fools no longer. You can't eat a flag." Gusty Spence described the Shankill as "The heartland of empire, where we ruled over nothing but poverty", and it felt as if some of the Loyalist paramilitaries had begun to see they had been duped. The UUP cease-fire remains intact, but substantial numbers have defected to the LVP, and the UDA cease-fire exists only as cruel joke. The voices of "progressive Unionism" have been sidelined.

The reason is clear enough. The Loyalist working class recognised in a resurgent nationalism, a threat to its sectarian privileges. In the 60s such 'privileges' were marginal, but remained a material fact and many took up arms to defend them. The PUP exists as a partial recognition of the fact that Protestant workers had nothing to fear from the nationalist working class and that in being reduced to foot soldiers for the likes of Paisley and Trimble, they'd receive nothing more than gaol terms and economic decay.

But Unionism is, by its nature, loyal to the state – albeit an idealised state rather than the day-to-day government of the six counties. The basis of that loyalty is, for Protestant workers, fear. A fear of losing something that no longer exists, but fear all the same. It is not possible to build a coherent socialist politics on the basis of Unionism. Unionism implies 1) loyalty to the state and crown and 2) the maintenance of the nationalist community as an insurgent 'other'.

Unless the likes of Trimble are challenged outright, as being the latest in a line of bigots who have divided the working class in the six counties in their own interests, Spence and Ervine will be forever sidelined, trying to 'democratise' a politics built on the denial of democracy. It is the logic of Unionism itself that needs to be abandoned. So long as ordinary Protestants are told their interests lie with the Union, the Trimbles and Paisleys will always win, because every move towards power sharing will be seen as an attack on the Union. If you are a socialist or a democrat, you cannot ultimately, be a Unionist. You may try, but history will undermine you at every turn.

Sinn Féin continues to hold dialogue with the PUP. Dawn Purvis, a PUP co-ordinator, has denounced "big house Unionism" as being concerned with "Protestant fears rather than people's rights". She says, "The Ulster Unionist Party's position was: keep the Union safe. I'm saying to myself, where's the housing, where's the food on my children's table?" With the determination of Trimble and the UUP to tear the Agreement apart, the best hope is that people like Ervine and Spence hold their courage and argue that Protestant fears have been used to deny Protestant rights as well as nationalist rights. If the apostles of Orange bigotry are to be denied their day, there need to emerge forces within the Loyalist working class who will declare explicitly for equality and democratic power sharing and put those ideas into practice on the ground. ■

New Labour has clearly decided that the Orange veto will be, as always, preserved by force.

basic rights. They are also key elements of the Agreement." (*Good Friday Agreement Only Way Forward*, in *An Phoblacht*, July)

Possibly the most obscene manifestation of Loyalist hypocrisy to date was the comment of John Taylor MP, following the shooting of Richard McFerran. Taylor threatened Unionist withdrawal from the talks (who'd notice?) "because of continuing IRA violence... especially against the Catholic community". Taylor has not concerned himself at all with the blatant anti-Catholic aggression of the LVP and UDA. The siege of the Gavarghy Road caused him no trouble. Taylor is only concerned



'The People's Flag is Deepest Black...'

Anarchism has always stood for a broad, and at times vague, political platform. The reasoning is sound; blueprints create dogma and stifle the creative spirit of revolt. Along the same lines and resulting in the same problems, anarchists have rejected the 'disciplined' leadership found in many other political groupings on the Left. Again, the reasoning is sound; leadership based on authority is inherently hierarchical. It seems to follow that since anarchists have shied away from anything static, they would also shy away from the use of symbols and icons. While this may explain why the origins of anarchist symbols are elusive, the fact is anarchists have used symbolism widely in their revolt against the State and Capital. Circled As are spray-painted on walls and under bridges all over the world; punks display them on their jackets and scrawl them into half-dried cement. Red-and-black, and black flags were resurrected in Russia and Eastern Europe after the fall of state socialism and continue to fly in most parts of the world.

Ironically, one of the original anarchist symbols was the red flag. But anarchism originated from the wider socialist and labour movements and common roots would imply a common imagery. However, as mainstream socialism developed in the nineteenth century into either reformist social democracy or the state socialism of the revolutionary Marxists, anarchists developed their own images of revolt, starting with the black flag. Recent times have seen the emergence of the green-and-black flag of eco-anarchism and other popular symbols include the IWW inspired 'wild-cat', the black rose and the ironic 'little black bomb'. This article, based on Jason Wehling's 1995 essay *Anarchism and the History of the Black Flag*, presents a short history of the most famous symbol – the black flag.

There are ample accounts of the use of black flags by anarchists. The most famous being Nestor Makhno's partisans during the Russian Revolution. Under the black banner, his army kept a large portion of the Ukraine free from concentrated power for a good couple of years. On the flag was embroidered "Liberty or Death" and "The Land to the Peasant, The Factories to the Workers."¹ Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican revolutionary, used a black flag adorned with a skull & crossbones and the Virgin,

as well as the slogan "Land & Liberty". In 1925, Japanese anarchists formed the Black Youth League and, in 1945, when the anarchist federation reformed, their journal was named *Kurohata* (*Black Flag*).² More recently, Parisian students carried black (and red) flags during the General Strike of 1968 as did the American Students for a Democratic Society national convention of the same year. Today, if you go to any sizeable demonstration you will usually see the black flag raised by the anarchists present.

The earliest account of the black flag involved Louise Michel and the Paris Commune of 1871. Michel flew the black flag on March 9 1883, during a 500-strong demonstration of the unemployed in Paris.³ The following year Paul Avrich reports that on November 27 the black flag was displayed in Chicago at an Anarchist demonstration. August Spies, one of the famous Haymarket martyrs, "noted that this was the first occasion on which [the black flag] had been unfurled on American soil".⁴ On a more dreary note, February 13 1921 saw Peter Kropotkin's funeral in Moscow. The funeral march stretching for miles, carried black banners proclaiming "Where there is authority there is no freedom."⁵ Black flags had first appeared in Russia during the founding of the Chernoe Zhania ('black banner') movement in 1905, yet two weeks after Kropotkin's funeral, the Kronstadt rebellion broke out and anarchism was erased from Soviet Russia for good.

Clearly this is the period when black flags were first adopted by anarchists, but their use of the red flag did not instantly die out. We find Kropotkin writing in *Words of a Rebel*, between 1880 and 1882, of "anarchist groups... rais[ing] the red flag of revolution." Woodcock notes, the "black flag was not universally accepted by anarchists at this time. Many, like Kropotkin, still thought of themselves as socialists and of the red flag as their's also."⁶ The drift away from the red flag towards the black must be placed in historical context. During the late 1870s and early 1880s the socialist movement was changing. Marxist social democracy was the dominant socialist trend, with libertarian socialism falling into decline in many areas. The red flag became associated with the authoritarian, statist and increasingly reformist face of the socialist movement.

In order to distinguish themselves from other socialists, the adoption of the black flag by anarchists made perfect sense.

Figuring out when the connection was made is easier than finding out why black was chosen. The *Chicago Alarm* explained that the black flag is "the fearful symbol of hunger, misery and death".⁷ Bookchin asserts that the black flag is the "symbol of the workers misery and as an expression of their anger and bitterness."⁸ In France, he records, "[i]n 1831, the silk-weaving artisans... rose in armed conflict to gain a better tariff, or contract, from the merchants. For a brief period they actually took control of the city, under red and black flags – which made their insurrection a memorable event in the history of revolutionary symbols."⁹ Kropotkin states that its use continued in the French labour movement after this uprising, when the Paris Workers "raised in June [1848] their black flag of 'Bread or Labour'".¹⁰ The use of the black flag by anarchists, therefore, is an expression of their roots and activity in the international labour movement.

So just as anarchists base their ideas on actual working class practice, they also adopted symbols emerging from this practice. For example, Proudhon argued that co-operative "labour associations" had "spontaneously, without prompting and without capital been formed in Paris and in Lyon... the proof of it [mutualism, the organisation of credit and labour]... lies in current practice, revolutionary practice." He considered his ideas to be an



expression of working class self-activity.¹¹ Indeed, according to K Steven Vincent, there was "close similarity between the associational ideal of Proudhon ... and the program of the Lyon Mutualists" and there was "a remarkable convergence [between the ideas], and it is likely that Proudhon was able to articulate his positive program more coherently because of the example of the silk workers of Lyon. The socialist ideal that he championed was already being realised, to a certain extent, by such workers."¹² Anarchists' politics aim to be the expression of tendencies within society and working class struggle and the use of traditional workers' symbols would be a natural expression of this ideal.

But there are other possibilities. Black is a very powerful colour, or anti-colour. The 1880s were a time of extreme anarchist activity. The Black International saw the introduction of "propaganda of deed" as an anarchist platform. So the colour black became also a symbol of the nihilism of the period, a nihilism exacerbated by the mass slaughter of Communards by the French ruling class after the fall of the Paris Commune of 1871. Black "is the colour of mourning [at least in Western cultures], it symbolises our mourning for dead comrades, those whose lives were taken by war, on the battlefield (between states) or in the streets and on the picket lines (between classes)."¹³ Given that many of the 25 000 dead Communards were anarchists, their use of the black flag after this event would make sense.

There may also be philosophical reason for the use of the colour black – it being commonly recognised as a sign of 'negation'. As such, the black flag fits nicely with Bakunin's ideas on progress. Bakunin accepted Hegel's dialectical method but always stressed that the negative was the driving force within it. Thus he defines progress as the negation of the initial position (for example, in *God and the State*, he argues that "[e]very development... implies the negation of its point of departure". What better symbol for the anarchist movement than one which is the negation of all other flags, signifying movement to a higher form of social organisation?

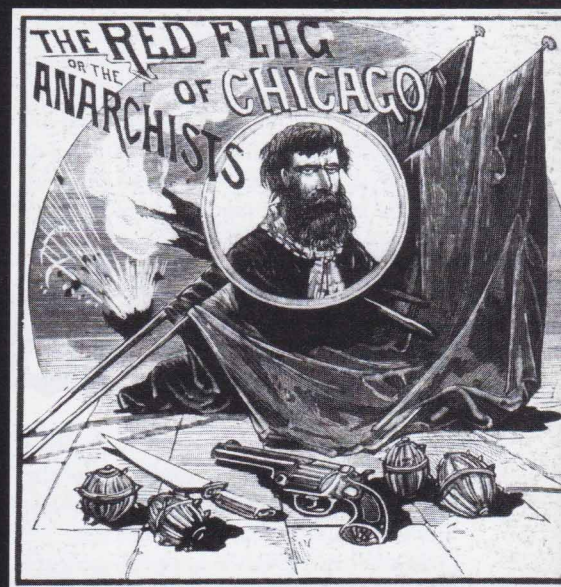
There is also a connection between the black flag and pirates (there is an unconfirmed report that Louise Michel, while leading the women's battalion during the Paris Commune, may have flown the skull and crossbones). Pirates were seen as rebels, free spirits, and often ruthless killers. Many had an elected Captain of the ship subject to 'instant recall' and in some cases the captain wasn't even male. Life on board a pirate ship was certainly more democratic than on board a navy or mer-

chant ship. For pirates, the black flag's message to their victims was "surrender or die!" Pirates owed allegiance to no code of law except whatever makeshift rules they improvised amongst themselves. Certainly pirates were not consciously anarchist but what is important is how they were seen. Their symbol was the embodiment of rebellion and the spirit of lawlessness. They were hated by the ruling class. This may have been enough for the starving and unemployed to pick up the black flag in revolt. One could quickly get a hold of a piece of red or black cloth in a riot but painting a complicated symbol on it took time. So an improvised rebel flag raised in a riot was likely to be of just one colour.

To sum up, we quote Howard Ehrlich from his book *Reinventing Anarchy*: "Why is our flag black? Black is a shade of negation. The black flag is the negation of all flags. It is a negation of nationhood which puts the human race against itself and denies the unity of all humankind. Black is a mood of anger and outrage at all the hideous crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of allegiance to one state or another. It is anger and outrage at the insult to human intelligence implied in the pretences, hypocrisies, and cheap chicaneries of governments... Black is also a colour of mourning; the black flag which cancels out the nation also mourns its victims, the countless millions murdered in wars, external and internal, to the greater glory and stability of some bloody state. It mourns for those whose labour is robbed (taxed) to pay for the slaughter and oppression of other human beings. It mourns not only the death of the body but the crippling of the spirit under authoritarian and hierarchic systems; it mourns the millions of brain cells blacked out with never a chance to light up the world. It is a colour of inconsolable grief.

But black is also beautiful. It is a colour of determination, of resolve, of strength, a colour by which all others are clarified and defined. Black is the mysterious surrounding of germination, of fertility, the breeding ground of new life which always evolves, renews, refreshes, and reproduces itself in darkness. The seed hidden in the earth, the strange journey of the sperm, the secret growth of the embryo in the womb all these the blackness surrounds and protects.

So black is negation, is anger, is outrage, is mourning, is beauty, is hope, is the fostering and sheltering of new forms of human life and relationship on and with this earth. The black flag means all these things. We are proud to carry it, sorry we have to, and look forward to the day when such a symbol will no longer be necessary."¹⁴ ■



Notes

- 1 Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible*, p. 475
- 2 Op. Cit., p. 525-6.
- 3 George Woodcock, *Anarchism*, pp. 251.
- 4 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy* pp. 144-145
- 5 Paul Avrich, *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, p. 26
- 6 *Words of a Rebel*, p. 75, p. 225
- 7 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*
- 8 Op. Cit., p. 57
- 9 *The Third Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 157
- 10 *Act for Yourself*, p. 100
- 11 *No Gods, No Masters*, vol. 1, pp. 59-60
- 12 *Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the Rise of French Republican Socialism*, p. 164
- 13 Chico, 'Letters', *Freedom*, vol. 48, No. 12, p. 10
- 14 *Reinventing Anarchy*, pp. 31-2

Black is a shade of negation. The black flag is the negation of all flags. It is a negation of nationhood which puts the human race against itself and denies the unity of all humankind.

Football is the national sport in Britain, as in most the world, and New Labour have embraced the cheap popularity the spin doctors reckon it brings. Most media criticism of the dominant role of football in popular culture comes from people who hate it, such as supposed feminists de-

pursuing a lifestyle. While Blair & Co think we should be tolerated, and oppose overt hatred, they don't really understand what the fuss is all about.

Jack Straw was expressing this view when he recently declared that same-sex couples would be second-best as parents to

no sense of irony). Since I react to abuse in the street by flipping bigots the finger or blowing them a kiss, why don't I speak out at football? The only answer I can come up with is I feel completely isolated.

The media and the football authorities have reluctantly been forced to acknow-

The Hate That Dares

nouncing it as sexist in terms which reveal their class hatred. Its acceptance by the establishment has been aided by an image makeover of the game as middle class.

In reaction to this, the image of hooliganism with the fans is beginning to change from that of mindless violence against one's own to that of defending our turf against the middle class invasion. This is in spite of football culture changing in reaction to the Heysel and Hillsborough stadium disasters and the rise of the fanzine movement, celebrating fans' intelligence. There is a need for a progressive movement among the fans to prevent the frustration and resentment vented on opposition or under-performing players and officials becoming a vehicle for a bigotry.

Yes, we have no bananas!

Consider for a moment one of life's little ironies. Kevin Campbell, a refugee from the racial abuse of his Turkish club's president, scores nine goals to win Everton four games and save them from relegation. The irony is that until fairly recently Everton, as their fans boasted, were 'white', as they had been reminding Liverpool fans since the latter's club signed John Barnes. The Reds' own racist contingent had marked Barnes' first game by throwing bananas onto the pitch.

The signings of Barnes by Liverpool in the late 1980s, then of Daniel Amokachi by Everton in the 'buy a World Cup player, any player' frenzy of 1994, 'cleared' the clubs, and their fans, of the racism charges. What really makes racism unacceptable is peer pressure and opposition from other fans. When racists feel safe, they still express their hatred. A guy sitting near me at Highbury once vented his frustration at perceived time-wasting by Amokachi as he was substituted by calling him a 'jigaboo', for example.

The isolated state of the racism still present in football contrasts with prevalent homophobia. So why is the government so concerned about the former, but part of the conspiracy of near-silence about the latter? The short answer is that they are heterosexual creeps who think we are merely

the nuclear family. Since 'gays' aren't visible on the football pitch or in the stands we can't be there, can we? This means that unlike black people we can be discounted, and the establishment's preferred response to racism – ignore it and it will go away, attack it and you'll only encourage them – can be applied to homophobia without much opposition.

When Paul Ince, then a Manchester United player, returned to West Ham United, his first club, a few years ago, much was made of the racism in his hostile reception. Bananas were allegedly thrown, but what you could hear on the highlights, so loud even the BBC couldn't disguise it, was "Incey takes it up the arse!" No comment was made on this whatever, and the BBC likes to keep crowd noise low so that the vocal emissions of the lower classes do not reach the delicate ears of the armchair 'fans'.

Regular racial abuse still happens, and is still ignored by commentators. At the last European Cup Winners' Cup Final, covered by the BBC at Villa Park, Real de Mallorca's Lauren was routinely greeted with monkey noises by the Lazio fans, to deafening silence from the commentary team, including Trevor Brooking who as a national sports administrator might reasonably be expected to express political views.

The allegation of homosexuality directed at Ince was easily identifiable as the worst conceivable insult in the minds of those chanting. Similarly, when discussing the Robbie Fowler/Graeme Le Saux incident, Sky pundit Frank McClintock thought being called a "poof" justified Le Saux's reaction. This is not unique to football, and doing something about homophobic abuse at grounds can not be isolated from the need to tackle the criminalisation of, discrimination and hate crimes against us in wider society.

I take it up the arse and I object, as any self-respecting Gooner would, to being likened to Graeme Le Saux. However, I have three times sat silently in the midst of thousands of my peers as they have gleefully sung "Le Saux takes it up the arse!" (to the tune of 'Go West!', some people have

ledge homophobia by Le Saux's whack to the back of Robbie Fowler's head after the latter had stuck out his backside and (allegedly) taunted our sensitive-but-straight hero with the words "Come on, Graeme, give it to me up the arse!". Le Saux, incidentally, got only a one-match ban for the assault, in spite of the fact that 'violent conduct' gets you a three-match ban, and Fowler got two matches for "bringing the game into disrepute". I can't help feeling that three matches apiece would have been best, and that Le Saux was treated leniently because he is straight, and no red-blooded man could let such an insult go unpunished.

The incident did at least, partially and temporarily, break the silence. The only previous media coverage of this salient feature of Arsenal-Chelsea games had been by gay football journalist Chas Newkey-Burden in *Time Out*, and that had been run in the gay, not the sport, section of the London listings magazine. Why people interested in the gay scene need to know homophobia is offensive, and sports fans don't, is a question that begs asking. It is ironic that Le Saux's defence of his heterosexuality, through stereotypical violence, brought the issue before a wider audience.

Le Saux's assault on Fowler meant there had to be media coverage. Professional Footballers' Association Chief Executive Gordon Taylor even said the unsayable, that there are gay footballers, but managed to make it sound like a hypothetical concept, rather than a reality. Unlike racism, homophobia is not just unacceptable, it is almost unspeakable. This is itself a problem, because it demonstrates that to acknowledge, or highlight, the existence of homophobia, is to admit to the existence of homosexuality in football. The reluctance to do this speaks volumes.

Real men take it up the arse!

I read a full page article on Le Saux in *The Independent* shortly before the Fowler incident where there was a coy reference to abusive chants "some of which question his masculinity". I actually missed a game

because of those chants. True, it would also have cost me £21 to see Arsenal Reserves get thumped five-nil at home by Chelsea in a competition so worthless Spurs won it, but the crunch was the homophobic crap.

Given recent events, it is unsurprising that gobshite Sports Minister Tony Banks,

can't tackle homophobia in the way racism has been made largely unacceptable.

It's difficult to say definitely why the level of homophobia has blown-up now – the Le Saux storm began at Highbury in January 1998. Certainly the perceived gay-friendliness of the government, aggravated

anti-Semitism and homophobia in football are tolerated as ways of getting at opposition players and fans. Football-related motives do not excuse such hatred, and while most of people will hate Le Saux because he plays for Chelsea, many will hate him because they think he's "gay".

Not Speak its Name!

with his affiliation to Chelsea, should have weighed in. According to *The Pink Paper*, having been contacted by a group of gay professional footballers, he urged them to come out and start a discussion on the subject. Since the manifestations of homophobia at football can not be separated from those in wider society, about which the 'gay friendly' government is determined to do as little as possible, it is a bit rich putting the onus on gay footballers to kick it off in isolation.

Especially at the highest level, professional footballers' earnings (which are as little as £8,000 a year – in the lower divisions of the League) are often made up of significant amounts of sponsorship. Now, call me a pessimist, but who is going to buy boots endorsed by a poof for their little boy? And how much stick would they get from their peers if they wore them? Unless there is significant progress towards making homosexuality (and bisexuality) acceptable, advertisers know the answer to those questions. Sponsors find gay events which 'stay within the community' attractive, but gay events which reach a wider audience don't get as much support.

Queer as folk's sponsor Beck's Beer pulled out after two episodes, and there have been gay – or lesbian – themed ad ideas pulled by the likes of Guinness and Virgin Vodka. The same would probably apply to out-gay professional footballers' chances of sponsorship. "Don't frighten the heterosexuals" remains the bottom line. Ironically, there was an ad for Amstel Beer during the African Nations Cup in South Africa a couple of years ago on Eurosport which featured a couple of drag queens and a leather-clad arse with a techno soundtrack and the slogan "...and enjoyed in the Amsterdam tradition!"

The gay footballer's dilemma also includes a big fear factor. Justin Fashanu may have had a lot of other stuff on his plate too, but 'gay footballer's suicide' is a big deterrent. So are some of the fans. As it was put in the Comic Strip's *The Crying Game*, Martina Navratilova never had to go to Elland Road. Until lesbian, gay and bisexual fans make our presence visible we

by its failure to actually take any effective measures, might be a factor. The tabloid hate campaigns, focused around the "heroic" battle of Baroness Young and the Bishops against the "all-powerful gay lobby", established the lie that "gay sex" and "gay lessons" were going to be imposed on "our kids". This could be part of the backlash, like the Soho bomb. The two bombs which preceded Soho were certainly part of a wider backlash to the gains made by the black community as the result of the Macpherson Enquiry into Stephen Lawrence's murder.

Le Saux's abuse is in stark contrast to the kind of casual homophobia we've taken for granted over the years – much of which is too stupid or bizarre to be anything other than funny – such as:

- One of two geezers who stumbled past me outside Islington Town Hall in May '94 singing "One Nil to the Arsenal!" saying to the other "I can't believe we're singing a song by a couple of poofs!"
- the North Bank chanting "Walker takes it up the arse!" at the Spurs goalkeeper for most of the second half of a home derby game;
- The Highbury Italians sitting behind me at a screening of Newcastle United vs. Arsenal calling Graham Barber a poof for sending off Tony Adams, and me thinking "not with that haircut!"

Mind you, the previous year the guy sitting next to me had literally screamed "Eric's a wanker!" for the entire second 45 minutes of the derby at Walker's predecessor, and the year after some plonkers sang, "Chim chimeney, chim chimeney, chim chimeney, Jurgen was a Nazi and now he's a Jew!" – xenophobic, anti-Semitic, inaccurate and, worst of all, crap! That day there had been a police message about racist chanting before the game, which brought a predictable chorus of "Yiddo! Yiddo!" in defiance.

Arsenal fans' leading role in homophobic abuse of Le Saux started as a typical reaction to a particularly fractious and annoying player – but has turned into something far worse. Racism, xenophobia,

All Fools' Day

As I recall, in the Middle Ages there was an All Fools' Day each year when dissent was allowed by the authorities. Football has an element of this. This can mean being free to do what is forbidden by authority, including for some fans hurling racial abuse and other expressions of hatred which are seen as being banned by 'political correctness'. Opposition to homophobia has to come from the fans to avoid being seen as a lecture, a 'middle class' restriction on 'freedom'.

I take it up the arse and I object, as any self-respecting Gooner would, to being likened to Graeme Le Saux.

The authorities and the media are only interested in exploiting anti-racist initiatives outside the stadia. The government will do nothing effective. It has demonstrated in relation to hate crimes that it considers equating homophobia with racism as devaluing the latter, "diluting the anti-racist message" is how they put it. Presumably they also deplore the fact that the nailbombers' evidently greater hatred of queers than of black and Asian people "diluted [their] racist message".

Part of the reason for this differential treatment is that black and ethnic minority people have argued, lobbied and rioted for more than 20 years to get from lipservice to the Macpherson Enquiry. Homophobia does not equate easily with racism, it is more like anti-Semitism, but the difference in government attitudes is down to insufficient pressure to force them to act. We have failed to assert that kind of sustained pressure.

The majority of people who acknowledge our same-sex desires are working-class, →



← and many of us have our own problems with (middle class) 'gay' culture, and the commercial scene. Many gay men assume that sport is not for nancy boys, but if you're working class and queer, football is part of your culture, and maybe your social life too. Our dilemma is whether to pretend that our gay and working class lives are separate, or to try and integrate the two and develop a distinctive expression of our gay lives in a working class context.

Back on February 13, I missed most of the first London Bisexual Festival, including the Bi Pride march, due to the 4th Round of the FA Cup. But if I hadn't been on my way to Bloomsbury after the game, I wouldn't have heard about the Replay, or had a discussion with Sheffield United fans about it, and found out that the club used to show Ian Wright's goal against Wednesday in the 1993 Final at half-time at Bramall Lane to cheer them up!

The Replay itself was on the same night as the first episode of 'Queer as Hype', I didn't have to rush through the gleeful crowds ("Would you like to start again!") but I was joking to myself "let me through, I've got a controversial gay drama to watch!". Two more Tuesday nights combined footie with QAF. And a woman I see on the train who I thought looked likely turned up at an away game screening with two teenage boys and another woman who looked even more likely. We're here but we seem to have accepted the idea that we shouldn't be.

"Who the fuck's Kinsey?"

For the last four years Arsenal have launched their new kit on the same day as Pride. To celebrate both a decent shirt and my sexuality, I ordered one with my Kinsey number on the back, combining a joke about gay culture with football shirt modification. This being Arsenal World of Profit, one member of staff was allocated to the hundreds of pre-ordered shirts, and two dozen to the queue-on-the-day. Football and the gay scene have more in common than either would like to admit.

Inevitably, one guy in the queue complained that he had "a wedding to go to". It occurred to me that "I've got a Gay Pride parade to go to!". I saw several other blokes wearing the new shirt at Pride later, but why are the numerous gay Gooners invisible? The Gay Football Supporters' Network is a social group, not a lobby group, but we really need to make ourselves visible as a group if we don't want to take the kind of shit Le Saux gets.

We are more visible when we are not 'the only one in the room', and invisibility and isolation stop us speaking out. What company also does is allow you to relate to each other, not just to the heterosexual world on its own terms. This makes your behaviour change, and means that tolerance is no longer an option for liberals. Because you are no longer a lone aberration, people have to accept or reject you. If they reject you and you won't go away, the struggle begins.

Most of that struggle has to take place in wider society, particularly in schools to combat homophobic bullying and heterosexual sex education. Achieving repeal of Section 28 would send out the right message, and help people gain the confidence to take up the issues. Then Banks can urge gay footballers to do their bit. It's fans, not the government who will effect any change – we can't wait until it's safe, none of this will happen without pressure on the streets, and in community organisations.

There has been an upswell in fan activism this summer around the Fans' Charter, presented to the Football Task Force by the Confederation of Football Supporters, comprising 103 fan groups. Respect for other fans should be as fundamental a concern as ticket prices, etc. If we want to do something about homophobic abuse, we should be part of this movement. ■

Perry Groves

Football Supporters' Association

PO Box 11, Liverpool L26 1XP;
www.fsa.org.uk

Confederation of Football Supporters

PO Box 11, Liverpool L26 1XP;
www.cofs.co.uk

Gay Football Supporters' Network

Box GFSN, Central Station
37 Wharfedale Road, London N1 9SE

@nacho-quiz

- 1 When was Piers Plowman urged to, "goe to his werke and chastise well Hob the Robber?"
- 2 In his final, utopian, publication *The Law of Freedom*, Gerrard Winstanley argued that the dozens of crimes which carried the death penalty in the 17th century should be replaced by just three. What were they?
- 3 *The Evening Standard* etc, got it wrong. PC Blakelock was not the first Metropolitan cop killed in a riot. Who was? What was the verdict at the subsequent inquest?
- 4 What reprisal for the 1919 Amritsar massacre was carried out in London in 1940?

[Answers on page 26]

I was Tony Blair's Lap Dog



Interview with Nick Cohen

Observer journalist Nick Cohen has been one of the most consistent and intransigent opponents of Jack Straw's Immigration & Asylum Bill. His weekly "reports on the sinister and preposterous" machinations of New Labour have captured the combination of rage and sheer disgust felt by so many at the continued venality of Blair's government.

As he puts it in his book *Cruel Britannia* "Joining New Labour is like joining the Mafia, you must first kill what you love to prove loyalty to the capo." Among the many reasons to interview Nick Cohen, three stand out beyond simply his consistency and commitment. He treats the Westminster soap opera with real contempt, he retains a class analysis and he's one of the very few left-wing voices in the mainstream press to combine rage and wit in equal measure. In person, he's as scathing and funny as you'd expect, and as 'off-message' as you could hope for.

Nick, can you tell us a bit about how you came to be at *The Observer*?

Well... simply, I left university, started at the bottom with local papers, and downhill from there really! I worked on the Children's page of the *Sutton Coldfield News*, *The Birmingham Post and Mail*, then came down to London, worked for *The Independent*, *The Independent on Sunday* and *The Observer*. *The Independent on Sunday* was then quite a strong left-of-centre paper in the classic English broadsheet tradition – it's since got a bit wet – and essentially, I'm from a generation of people who were 18 when Thatcher came to power, and coming from the north I found the acceptance of the Thatcherite consensus in the media baffling. I'm from Manchester, I lived in Birmingham when the manufacturing industry was decimated. I come from a radical, Labour family. These days you find that just by standing still you end up on the extreme left.

You've talked about becoming disillusioned with New Labour in office, of being a schmuck for believing any of the promises Labour made. Is that disillusionment genuine – did you have expectations of the Blair government?

It was and it wasn't. I was a home affairs specialist when Labour was in opposition. I used to know Straw and Blair quite well.

I even quite liked them. And then... you remember all the things they said to you... and you watch them abandon every tiny humane political commitment they made. I was genuinely shocked by them. This government is doing things quite proudly, with no sense of shame, which however far to the left you were, you would have regarded as inconceivable by a Labour government.

What do you think underpins New Labour's agenda?

There was a brilliant essay written by Raphael Samuel in the early 80s called *The SDP and the New Middle Class*¹, which could be reprinted today, substituting New Labour for the SDP, and what he talks about is an English middle class that's gone sour. It's not frightened of an insurgent poor. The period that began with the rise of the organised working class in the 1880s is over. They're not frightened any more. They've no sense of guilt or duty any more. They look at the people beneath them and just think "if you had anything about you – you'd be me." So New Labour represents a set of politics that says the best thing that can be done for the lower orders is give them a good slapping. Get them to shape up. Get them to be like us, stop drinking and eat Italian food! We live in an age where racial hatred is persona non grata, so is hatred of women and hatred of gays, but the one thing that's absolutely flourishing is class hatred.

.....
These days you find that just by standing still you end up on the extreme left.
.....

It's clear that that real contempt for working class people pervades a big chunk of the media as well.

In the 30s and the 60s there were quite serious attempts made to get authentic working class voices published, but now if you say in journalism or in publishing "where are working class writers?" people look at you like you're mad.

And equally, the solution to working class problems, whether it be education or poverty, is to get them to ape the middle class more closely, or get the middle class to move back in and set an example. It's seen as a moral not an economic or political issue.

I think there is something to be said for stopping white flight from cities, but I think what's interesting is how much Blair has moved away from even the limited promises he made. The one real promise they had was that they'd increase democracy. Once you've got greater democracy, all kinds of things become possible, marginalised voices get heard, minorities get access to power. What's interesting therefore is that on their own terms, by their own standards, by their own better instincts, New Labour have betrayed themselves. The debate about Old Labour v. New Labour is beside the point. New Labour isn't carrying on as New Labour. We only have to look at its attitude to official secrecy, the lack of a democratic element in the health service reforms... on their own terms they are failing. I could have put up with, although it wouldn't have been all I wanted... a Labour Party committed to democratisation, even that would still have been worth having. Even before the election, Peter Mandelson was saying the commitments to a freedom of Information Act were going to have to wait. "What we don't want is rights to know what's happening, we just want good people in office, people like me, for example. People you can trust!"

You've got to understand as well that New Labour inside the Labour Party is run as a clique. The majority of MPs, the majority of party members don't like it. But New Labour is a clear ideological project, so they have to control. Conservative friends of mine often ask, "How do you attack this government from the right?" →

← One of the issues that's never addressed is what kinds of political organisation are likely to fill the vacuum left by Labour in working class areas. Darcus Howe² has just returned from a 'tour of the North' for Channel Four and was shocked at the extent of sympathy for the far right expressed by white working class kids in areas like Bradford.

The 1997 election was supposed to be the most important election since 1979. Everyone knew there was going to be a change of government. The turn-out – 72% – was the lowest in the history of British democracy. In one sense, that's understandable working class abstentionism. What scares me is that we'll end up like America, where only the middle classes vote and so the parties compete for ever more rightward-moving votes. The Labour Party have been wooing the upper middle class and taking the working class core vote for granted. What they've failed to realise is that if they can't mobilise their core vote they could lose the next general election.

Also the nature of the kind of turbo-charged capitalism that we have now is such that whole communities are suddenly rendered surplus to requirements. In the past they'd look to the left, where do they go now? So we're faced with two possible and equally depressing scenarios. 1) we become like America, with a massive underclass which is politically passive, and you lock up huge amounts of people (there are now two million people in jail in America – you can now talk quite seriously about an American gulag) or 2) we become like parts of Europe, with a quasi FN on the rise.

Recently, you've written a lot about the Immigration & Asylum Bill. Tell us why. Partly because no one else was. Partly because it's based on a gigantic lie. Partly because I'm the great grandson of refugees and one does get the feeling that if Tony Blair had been in power I'd never have been born. I'm in a very privileged position. I can write what I like, and if something very bad is happening you've just got to

get stuck in, you've got to be relentless. On that issue I really tried. When it went through virtually unchallenged I decided I'd had it with the Labour Party. I genuinely couldn't vote for them. They're a bunch of sickos and child abusers really. They're very good at telling everyone else that they must live up to the bracing standards of the private sector (where I've worked for most of my adult life, and where most of them have never worked), but if anyone who managed the Home Office like Jack Straw does, worked in the private sector, they'd be fired.

What sort of response do you get from Labour MPs?

Oh, in private it's all "keep going", "we're right behind you". On one occasion I was with a Labour MP who told me, "It's disgusting what they're doing, I'm going to fight them in private etc." After our conversation I asked him to drop me in the bar. On the way we bumped into a tall, distinguished looking man in his early forties. The MP practically throws me into the bar, going "Fuck! Fuck! That's my career finished." Oh, I said, was that Alistair Campbell? I thought it was hilarious. This is an elected member, a representative of the British people – Alistair Campbell when all is said and done is just a boring, brutish press officer.

One of the things that makes your column unique is that it's not just about you. How difficult is it to write 'politically' in the media now?

If you'd work for the Murdoch press you'd think twice about taking them on. The Labour wonks do try and exert pressure. If you work for a reasonable paper and you're not dependent on the New Labour spin doctors, what can they do? There are a lot of journalists who have been publicly humiliated who will one day take a chance to bite the hand that slapped them.

I'm very concerned about the decline of radical writing in Britain. The best of English writing historically has been from the left. Something has gone radically wrong

if it is somehow considered low class to use all the skills of a writer – to use bathos, to use rhetoric, to use irony. Although I think New Labour is an absolute disaster for the country, professionally it's wonderful for me – it'll keep me in work forever! But seriously, one of the difficulties is that, with the amalgamations of modern business, it's very difficult for an independent radical press to survive. Where is the advertising which would support it, when the local coffee shop has been replaced by Coffee Republic, and the radical bookshop has given way to Waterstones. To do something like, say *City Limits* would be so much harder today. Every age has a spirit, and the spirit of our age is deconstruction. It sounds absurd to suggest that a bunch of bonkers and boring and obscurantist Parisian philosophers can affect the spirit of the age – but they at least represent it very well; so that there are no great causes, no great issues, everything is suspect. They might think themselves very radical for saying this, but its effects are profoundly conservative, because all you breed is a cynicism, which substitutes facts for opinion and places a great premium on the personal. So debate gets reduced to journalists burbling on about Irritable Bowel Syndrome or aren't husband's horrid. That works profoundly against a rational, radical journalism... It's a fault of mine that my work tends to depress people. I hope it doesn't. Firstly, because you can't do anything unless you see things clearly, and secondly, I think if I can get a bit of fire in someone's stomach or a mocking smile on one person's lips, then I've succeeded. ■

Notes

1 *The SDP and the New Middle Class*, in *Island Stories* – Raphael Samuel, (published by Verso)

2 Darcus Howe is a founder of *Race Today* magazine and collective, journalist and broadcaster

Cruel Britannia by Nick Cohen is published by Verso.

@nacho-quiz answers

- 1 The Peasants Revolt, 1381. This was part of a complicated cryptic message passed by word of mouth, thought to have been the signal to kick off previously-made plans.
- 2 (i) Murder, (ii) Buying or selling, (iii) Paying a lawyer
- 3 Constable Thomas Culley was stabbed in the Calthorpe Street (or Clerkenwell) riot of 1833 – the violent debut of the Metropolitan Police. Despite being virtually imprisoned by the coroner and denied food or water, the inquest jury insisted on returning a verdict of "justifiable homicide".
- 4 Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Governor General of the Punjab at the time of the massacre was shot dead by Udham Singh at a public meeting in Caxton Hall, Westminster. Udham was hanged, but transcripts of his trial and other information, including statements of his political views, were suppressed under the '100 year rule'. Even recent Indian government requests for this material have been refused.

The Brazilian Anarchist Uprising of 1918

81 years ago Rio de Janeiro was shaken by a series of events that culminated in one of the most important episodes in the history of the Brazilian workers' movement: an insurrectionary strike designed to bring down oligarchic republican government and replace it with a workers' and soldiers' council.

From 1917, class-conscious Brazilian workers, particularly in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo had been organising at an accelerated rate. In July that year, São Paulo had ground to a halt after a general strike triggered by the police murder of a young shoemaker. For four days the city was turned into a battlefield with countless clashes between the masses and the security forces. In Rio de Janeiro, which was the capital in those days, militants from the FORJ (Federação Operária do Rio de Janeiro) had been busy with a campaign against the cost of living and by May there had been nearly 50 rallies, in spite of police bans. Alongside this process the FORJ was painstakingly reorganising the trade unions. By the middle of the year this was bearing fruit with the establishment of the Civil Construction Workers' Union (UOCC) and the Textile Workers' Union (UOFT). Brutal repression of the Corcovado Textile Plant strike in May and the collapse of the New York Hotel on July 7 with the deaths of dozens of workers exasperated the carioca (Rio) workers. On July 17 1917, a gathering at the FORJ headquarters decided to go on strike. The strike quickly spread to a number of industries, strengthening the unions which experienced dizzying growth from then on.

1918 opened under the shadow of the revolution in Russia which triggered a wave of optimism and unrest in the conscious proletariat the world over. In January, libertarian militants established the Rio de Janeiro Anarchist Alliance, a specific social propaganda organisation. 1st March saw the establishment of the General Workers' Union (UGT) when the FORJ was banned by the police after the general strike.

In April, following a fortnight on strike, the shoemakers won the eight and a half hour working day. The press started to speculate about a 'planned general strike' and the police cracked down on the

UGT. With a state of siege decreed, May Day was marked in a big UGT-sponsored rally in the Theatro Maison Moderne in the Praça Tiradentes. June and July saw strikes by cabinet-makers, marble workers, colliers, dockers and hat-makers, with several textile plants being brought to a standstill. On August 3, a strike was called for better wages and shorter hours for the shipbuilders and the tram workers. The strike resembled an uprising following clashes between the populace and the security forces in the Rua da Conceição in Niterói. Several troopers from the army's 58th Chasseurs defected to the strikers, two of them being shot dead in the exchange of fire. This raised workers' expectations of forging an alliance with the lower ranks of the armed forces, as had happened in Russia.

As the cost of living rose throughout the country there was an upsurge in strikes and demonstrations in virtually every state capital and industrial city. Again there were rumours of a general strike looming in Rio and this caused the upper echelons of the Republicans some concern. Meanwhile, in the city of Petrópolis in Rio state, the famished populace looted and fought with the police.

Disaster struck at the end of September. Rio was hit by the Spanish flu epidemic which claimed the lives of thousands of workers. The police rounded-up workers active on the Committee to Combat the Epidemic as the bourgeoisie and the authorities fled to the safety of the mountains. By November, the epidemic was easing off, but starvation continued to claim hundreds of lives.

The approaching uprising was pre-saged by a flurry of activity. The textile employers refused to heed the weavers' demands; the newspapers were filled with reports of proletarian revolution in Germany, the ending of the First World War, and of Delfim Moreira standing in for the ailing elected President Rodrigues Alves on November 15.

On November 18, the weavers declared a strike in the mills in Rio, Niterói, Petrópolis, Magé and Santo Aleixo simultaneously. The metalworkers and construction workers threw their weight behind it. In the mid-afternoon, strikers began to converge on the Campo de São Cristóvão. The police ordered them to disperse and tried to make arrests. The workers retaliated and shooting started. Two bombs went off at the police station and the crowds in-

vaded the premises. Shortly after that, troops intervened to clear the police station and scatter the workers who were attempting to invade the army stores. The fighting spread into neighbouring streets and cavalry charges scattered the rebels. Controversially, Edgar Rodrigues, in his 1972 book based on depositions from militants, argues that the workers, having learned from a captain that the uprising had been betrayed, kept things low-key. The uprising was doomed in advance.

The soldiers' treachery and failure to go over to the rebels put paid to the plans painstakingly worked-out over months. The details of those plans were known in advance to the police and army. One serviceman, Lieutenant Jorge Elias Ajus, had infiltrated the movement and taken part in all of the meetings and was even placed in charge of the rebellion's military strategy. The plan was that after capturing the army's stores, the workers and mutinous soldiers would make for the city centre and attack the prefecture, Police Headquarters and the barracks of the Police Brigade. Meanwhile, workers from the southern zone were to attack the Palácio do Catete and the Chamber of Deputies, after which the establishment of a Workers' and Soldiers' Council would be proclaimed.

In the early evening of November 18 all of the movement's 'ringleaders' and almost 200 anarchist militants, workers and 'suspects' were arrested. At the gates of the Confiação factory, police killed the weaver Manuel Martins and wounded another who died a few days later. The funeral procession, even though banned, was escorted by hundreds of workers. In spite of violent repression, the weavers', metalworkers' and construction workers' strike dragged on for a further two weeks. On November 20 the repression led to the closure of these unions' premises and on November 22 the UGT was disbanded by order of the federal government.

The 1918 uprising was no starry-eyed adventure of little consequence; it was an attempt by the workers themselves to effect their liberation, based on their own experiences of struggle and organisation and their desire to see the yearned for Social Revolution made a reality. The finest tribute we could pay these comrades is our struggle to keep alive the flame that will light the way to a classless, exploitation-free society with neither State nor domination. ■

THE MEDICINE STILL ISN'T WORKING

Hayek's Economics Exposed

Given that Tony Blair's government seems intent on extending the legacy of Thatcherism into the new millennium, it is useful to remember some of the claims made by Thatcher's ideological heavy-weights from the past. Is the success of Thatcherism all it is claimed to be? What lessons can we draw to resist Blair now? One of the major 'improvements' claimed by Thatcher was trade union 'reform'. The idea that social struggle and working class organisation are harmful was expressed throughout the 1970s. If we look at the arguments of the right during this period, we find evidence that the claim that 'Thatcherism' was a great success is decidedly wrong – as is the notion that 'trade union reform' aided working class people.

With the post-war Keynesian consensus crumbling, the 'New Right' argued that trade unions (and strikes) hampered growth and that wealth redistribution hindered 'wealth creation'. In February this year, the Trade & Industry Secretary, Stephen Byers argued that "wealth creation is now more important than wealth redistribution," echoing the claims of Thatcher and her cronies. Do not struggle over income, the 'New Right' argued, let the market decide and everyone will be better off. Twenty years later, 'New Labour' is repeating the same argument.

Unsurprisingly, this argument was dressed up in populist clothes. Thus we find the right-wing guru FA von Hayek arguing that the "legalised powers of the unions have become the biggest obstacle to raising the standards of the working class as a whole. They are the chief cause of the unnecessarily big differences between the best- and worse-paid workers." He maintained that "the elite of the British working class... derive their relative advantages by keeping workers who are worse off from improving their position." Moreover, he "predict[ed] that the average worker's income would rise fastest in a country where relative wages are flexible, and where the exploitation of workers by monopolistic trade union organisations of specialised workers are effectively outlawed."¹

Now, if Hayek's claims were true we could expect that in the aftermath of Thatcher's trade union reforms we would have seen the following:

- 1) a rise in economic growth
 - 2) a decrease in the differences between high and low paid workers
 - 3) a reduction in the number of low paid workers as they are freed from union 'exploitation' and
 - 4) wages rising fastest in countries with the highest wage flexibility.
- Unfortunately for Hayek, the actual trajectory of the British economy exposes his claims as nonsense. Looking at each of Hayek's claims in turn we discover that rather than 'exploit' other workers, trade unions are an essential means to shift income from capital to labour (which is why capital fights labour organisers and

Do not struggle over income, the 'New Right' argued, let the market decide and everyone will be better off. Twenty years later, 'New Labour' is repeating the same argument.

agitators tooth and nail). And, equally important, labour militancy aids all workers by providing a floor under which wages cannot drop (non-unionised/militant firms in the same industry or area have to offer similar programs to prevent unionisation and be able to hire workers) and by maintaining aggregate demand. This positive role of unions/militancy in aiding all workers can be seen by comparing Britain before and after Thatcher's trade union and labour market reforms.

As far as economic growth goes, there has been a steady fall since the trade union reforms. In the 'bad old days' of the 1970s, with its strikes and 'militant unions', growth was 2.4% in Britain. It fell to 2% in the 1980s and to 1.2% in the 1990s.² Falling growth means that the living standards of the working class as a whole do not rise as fast as they did under the 'exploitation' of the 'monopolistic' trade unions. If we look at the differences between the highest and lowest paid workers, we find Hayek again proved wrong. Rather than decreasing, they have

in fact shown "a dramatic widening out of the distribution with the best-workers doing much better" since Thatcher was elected in 1979.³

Given that inequality has also increased, the condition of the average worker must have suffered. For example, Ian Gilmore states that "[i]n the 1980s, for the first time for fifty years... the poorer half of the population saw its share of total national income shrink."⁴ According to Noam Chomsky, "[d]uring the Thatcher decade, the income share of the bottom half of the population fell from one-third to one-fourth" and between 1979 and 1992, the share of total income of the top 20% grew from 35% to 40% while that of the bottom 20% fell from 10% to 5%. In addition, the number of UK employees with weekly pay below the Council of Europe's "decency threshold" increased from 28.3% in 1979 to 37% in 1994.⁵ "Overall," notes Takis Fotopoulos, "average incomes increased by 36 per cent during this period [1979-1991/2], but 70 per cent of the population had a below average increase in their income."⁶

Looking at the claim that trade union members gained their "relative advantage by keeping workers who are worse off from improving their position" it would be fair to ask whether the percentage of workers in low-paid jobs decreased in Britain after the trade union reforms. In fact, the percentage of workers below the Low Pay Unit's definition of low pay (namely two-thirds of men's median earnings) increased – from 16.8% in 1984 to 26.2% in 1991 for men, from 44.8% to 44.9% for women. For manual workers it rose by 15% to 38.4%.⁷ If unions were gaining at the expense of the worse off, you would expect a decrease in the number in low pay, not an increase. An OECD study concluded that "[t]ypically, countries with high rates of collective bargaining and trade unionisation tend to have low incidence of low paid employment."⁸

Nor did unemployment fall after the trade union reforms. As Elliot and Atkinson point out, "[b]y the time Blair came to power, unemployment in Britain was falling, although it still remained higher than it had been when the [the last Labour Government of] Callaghan left office in May 1979."⁹ Hayek did argue that falls in

Hayek's prediction on wage flexibility leading to higher wages for the "average worker" has been proved totally wrong. Between 1967 and 1971, real wages grew (on average) by 2.95% per year.¹¹ In comparison, in the 1990s real wages grew by 1.1 per cent.

GDP grew at a faster rate than Britain's, averaging 1.4 per cent per year, compared with 1.2 per cent. Worker productivity is also behind; since 1979 (Thatcher's arrival) Britain's worker productivity has been 1.9 per cent per year compared to France's 2.2 per cent.¹² And as Seth Ackerman also notes, "[w]hile France's dismal record of job creation is on permanent exhibit, it is never mentioned that Britain's is even more dismal."¹³

of the population. Between 1950 and 1978, when the labour market was more inflexible and had stronger unions, income growth grew by 138%, 98% and 106% respectively. Moreover, the growth of the US economy has also slowed down as wage flexibility and market reform has increased. Inequality since the 1960s has steadily increased, reaching extraordinary levels by the 1990s.

Why bother to document the utterly wrong predictions of an icon of the right? Partly, of course, it is fun to show up the massive errors of our enemies. More importantly, it is necessary to expose the hype and short-term memory of the media in order to fully counter the claims that the last 20 years have been anything but a disaster for working class people. In addition, it shows the way to improve our conditions. Militancy, direct action, solidarity and working class organisation work, they are effective and they get results. This is the message that is easily seen from comparing von Hayek's claims and predictions with reality. It also shows the necessity of creating a new working class movement based on these principles, the principles of anarchism. ■



1. 1980s Unemployment and the Unions reproduced in *The Economic Decline of Modern Britain*, p. 107, p. 108, p. 110
2. Larry Elliot & Dan Atkinson, *The Age of Insecurity*, p. 230
3. Andrew Glyn & David Miliband (eds.), *Paying for Inequality*, p. 100
4. *Dancing with Dogma*, p. 113
5. *World Orders, Old and New*, p. 144, p. 145
6. *Towards an Inclusive Democracy*, p. 113
7. *Paying for Inequality*, p. 102
8. *OECD Employment Outlook*, 1996, p. 94
9. Op. Cit., p. 258
10. p. 77
11. P. Armstrong, A. Glyn & John Harrison, *Capitalism Since World War II*, p. 272
12. Seth Ackerman, *The Media Vote for Austerity*, Extral, September/October 1997
13. Ibid.
14. *Economic Report of the President* 1995, Table B-45

P|R|I|S|O|N|E|R|S

MARK BARNESLEY UPDATE

The Sheffield Star was one of the papers that carried lies about Liverpool fans in the wake of the Hillsborough tragedy. It continues its tradition – printing lies about ordinary people from *Big Issue* sellers to Mark Barnesley.

The Star claimed Mark was a madman who attacked fifteen students with a knife. Now it attacks the campaign to free him saying that it is adding fresh agony to his "victims". Well one campaign achievement for a start!



June saw two actions in support of Mark. One was a picket of the court and *The Star*, joined by people from the Hillsborough campaign. After the pickets, leaflets were handed out in the high street. There was also a well-attended public meeting addressed by Paddy Hill, one of the Birmingham Six, who drew together the themes of class and police cover-ups. One unwelcome guest at the meeting was a *Star* reporter who left after being offered the option of being removed.

Contact the campaign for updates, a video of the meeting and their new Justice for Mark Barnesley t-shirts.

Justice for Mark Barnesley
c/o 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ
Write to Mark at:
WA2897, HMP Full Sutton, York, YO41 1PS

BACK IN THE USSR?

A travesty of justice is being acted out in the Krasnodar region of Russia. On July 20, the Pervomaysky district court in Krasnodar ruled on the case of anarchists arrested several months ago. The prison sentence for two of them was particularly harsh, especially as one of them, Larisa Schiptsova is eight months pregnant and subject to an amnesty, valid until the end of the year.

Larisa's lawyer, Stanislav Markelov, was harassed by the FSB in both Krasnodar and Moscow. The court failed to listen to all of the witnesses, and the main witness, Maria Randina, denied that Larisa had given her an explosive device. Pledges for amnesty were refused by the court, contrary to the regulations of the amnesty bill, which is valid until December this year.

The sentences were four years in a prison camp for Larisa Schiptsova and three years for Gennady Nepshikuyev; no amnesty or postponement of the sentences were allowed. These sentences were announced on the same day that the journalist Grigory Pasko was freed from prison in Vladivostok. The two cases are very similar, in both cases were the original serious crimes charges ("terrorism" in case of the Krasnodar Three, "betrayal of the country" in case of Pasko – for reporting information on nuclear waste in the Russian Pacific Navy) not presented in court. Nevertheless, once imprisoned, the accused didn't stand a chance of being acquitted – neither the KGB nor the procurator's office ever admit "mistakes" but press weaker charges and ask for softer sentences. Pasko was charged with violations of his responsibilities, sentenced to three years, amnestied and freed. He was also lucky to have public opinion on his side and extensive media coverage. The anarchists arrested in Krasnodar received much less media coverage. Not a single Russian national paper reported the court ruling the next day.

These prosecutions and the harsh sentences are entirely politically motivated. The anti-Semitic governor of the Region, Kondratenko, has said some outrageous things about the case. We (the Solidarity Federation) will be doing our utmost to bring this case to wider international attention and highlight continued abuses by the successors to the notorious Cheka and KGB.
Solidarity Federation – IWA

OREGON J18 PRISONER

AN URGENT CALL FOR SUPPORT

Two months on, anarchist Robert Thaxton remains in jail, awaiting sentencing for supposed attempted murder [throwing a stone at a cop] during the June 18 Reclaim The Streets Event in Eugene, Oregon. During his arrest, Robert was severely beaten. Eugene police have attempted to cover-up this beating and frequently continue to deny Robert's lawyer access to him. Robert has been singled out for prosecution because of his anarchist beliefs and in an effort by the Eugene police to put the whole June 18th event on trial.

Robert is 36, has a two-year-old daughter, and is a committed anarchist who has made many positive contributions to the movement over a considerable period of time – most recently writing for *Anarchy, A Journal Of Desire Armed*. Robert will not be hiding his beliefs during his trial. The claim that Robert threw a rock at a police officer is false. The only evidence is a report from the officer who beat Robert and who is known for harassing and singling-out activists. Robert acted as a peace-maker during the event but likely was singled out because of his activism.

All struggles are linked. Through his website, Robert provided considerable support for Leonard Peltier and other American political prisoners. It is important for all involved in the class struggle to see the link between different struggles and different political prisoners.

Eugene has been the site of an extremely militant and effective anti-gentrification struggle – as much development and speculation continues. The prosecution of Robert is an effort to increase repression in Eugene and could have a follow-on effect throughout the country. Robert still needs funds for his legal defence. He would also appreciate people writing to him in jail.

Rob can be written to at: Robert Thaxton #1370036, 101 West 5th Eugene, or 97401. Jail letter restrictions are demanding and arbitrary. Paper should be new and perfectly clean (for some reason). All books sent should come from the publisher – although even books from AK press have been rejected.

All donations should be sent to: Anti-Authoritarian Anonymous, PO Box 11331 Eugene or 97440. Any cheques or money orders should have the payee left blank.

REMOTE CONTROL

Prisoner Justice Day this year was marked by a picket of Woodhill Control Unit in Milton Keynes. The unit has been operating as a prison within a prison since February 1998, and already has a reputation amongst prisons for brutality and inhumane conditions. Prisoners are held in cells with only a cardboard bed and a chair, and are allowed no books or magazines. In the words of one prisoner, "A and D wings are treated like animals. They are fed through door hatches, no access to radios or drawing materials, £2.50 private cash, the cell windows don't open to prevent prisoners from talking to each other, 23 hour bang-up, one shower a week. The list is endless."

The regime at Woodhill makes no attempt at rehabilitation. Imagine being confined in a cell 23 hours a day with nothing to read, no craft projects or education materials to occupy your mind and no release date in sight. People can only become more fucked-up and aggressive under these conditions. In addition, violence and brutality from the screws is common. In special control units like Woodhill everything is arbitrary, there is no fixed release date, letters and visits are a privilege to be removed or restored at whim. These units are a means of isolating prisoners who fight back from others in the main prison system and are also a way of reducing solidarity by having prisoners on many different degrees of privileges or punishments.

"In truth Woodhill exists as an instrument of fear and political control over long term prisoners and is specifically intended to isolate and destroy both individual and collective response". John Bowden, HMP Parkhurst.

Prisoners in Woodhill and other prisons organised protests such as work strikes and hunger strikes to commemorate Prisoner Justice Day. Some active prisoners were moved out of Woodhill to other prisons a couple of days before, others were put in the segregation unit. The demo outside was well-attended with prisoners' families and friends outnumbering politicians, and the 'Demolish Woodhill' banner was welcomed by a lot of visitors.

BIBA SARKARIA – FIGHTING FOR EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ASIAN WOMEN PRISONERS

Biba Sarkaria, who has for years fought for the rights of women prisoners has been waiting over 19 weeks now to hear the outcome of her own parole application which she made in April 1999. Prison policy states that every prisoner will hear the result of their parole application within six weeks. So why, asks Biba, am I still waiting?

Biba says that in all the time she has

spent in prison (over ten years) she has only seen one or two Asian women get parole, home leave, town visits or tagging, no matter what their circumstances. She, herself, has tried on many occasions to fight for home leave for Asian women whose fathers were dying or children seriously injured, but the authorities showed no compassion. However the same prison authorities (Cookhamwood) give white prisoners home leave, tagging, parole and the better prison jobs. While "we (Asian women) are even taken to the local hospital with handcuffs and three prison officers. Last time they did that to me I refused to go." She says that since April 1996 only one Asian woman at Cookhamwood has been given home leave, while many others have been refused with flimsy reasons. One governor said he was worried about his job if he allowed an Asian woman home leave.



While Biba awaits the outcome of her parole application, suffering from acute back pain (the result of a protest she made against the racism at Cookhamwood), and a serious heart condition; she is now also faced with the brutal decision of the prison authorities not to meet her request for specially prepared food. Biba who is a practising Sikh needs to eat food prepared in conditions which are hygienic and not mixed with foods forbidden by her religion (certain meat). Until now Biba was able to prepare this food herself or get fellow prisoners to prepare it as she is one of the (83 out of 150) prisoners who is allowed to prepare her own food. However recently (May 1999), the kitchen in which she used to cook has now been allocated to seventeen additional inmates. For Biba this has meant that she can no longer cook there. The

fridge is full of food which has been there for days, the floor has not been cleaned in weeks and every health and safety regulation is being broken. Biba says: "there's only one cleaner and she only comes once a week and there's only so much she can do. As for inspectors, the only inspectors we see are the ones who come here, talk, smile, drink coffee and smoke cigarettes and then go away."

The Asian women prisoners group is demanding that the Prison Authorities:

- Meet their legal obligation to provide Biba Sarkaria (and others in a similar situation) with the food she needs.
- Provide a response to Biba Sarkaria's (fourth) application for parole
- Provide a response to her demand for an investigation into the racism at Cookhamwood prison.

Letters and faxes of protest should be sent to: Parole & Lifer Group, Terry McCarthy (Head of Parole Board), Abell House, John Islip Street, London SW1 4LH, or fax to: Jon Irving, Parole Unit, Room 126, Abell House, John Islip St, London SW1 4LH, Tel: 0171 217 5124 / 5216 / 3000.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State George Howarth, Minister Responsible for Prisons & Probation, Fax 0171 273 2565.

The Home Secretary: Jack Straw, Fax: 0171 273 3965.

Asian Women Prisoners' Group, c/o Londec, Instrument House, 205-217 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DB, Tel: 0171-713-7907, Email londec@hotmail.com.

JEROME WHITE-BEY

Regular readers will know how us prisoners are used as virtual slave labour by many corporations. Right-wing politicians and the companies who run many of the prisons are understandably keen to ensure their literally captive labour force doesn't get too big for its boots.

So it is no surprise that a prisoner trying to organise a union among inmates in Missouri has come under attack. Jerome White-Bey has been told by prison superintendent Michael Kemna that not only is he not allowed to promote the union inside the prison, he can't do it outside either – whether by writing or having supporters publicise it.

As Jerome points out, the United States has a constitution to guarantee free speech, doesn't it? Protests to Michael Kemna, Superintendent, Crossroads Correctional Center, 1115 E Pence Road, Cameron MO 64429 and Dora B Schriro, Director, Department of Corrections, 2729 Plaza Drive, PO Box 236, Jefferson City, MO 65102 USA.

Source: Albuquerque ABC
2300 Central Ave SE, Box 122
Albuquerque NM 87106, USA

Film & the Anarchist Imagination

by Richard Porton Verso – £13.00 paperback

Richard Porton's book is intended as "an authoritative, alternative account of films featuring anarchist characters and motives." Porton's attitude to anarchism is refreshing. He defends the anarchist record of "working class self activity" and reports approvingly Victor Serge's comment that "Anarchism swept us away completely because it demanded everything of us and offered everything to us. There was no remote corner of life that it failed to illumine."

The opening chapters of the book detail the stereotypes of anarchists which "permeate both Hollywood fluff and European art cinema." He launches a stout and amusing defence of the anarchist left, against the notion that anarchism is reducible to "assassination, bomb throwing and violence." Porton notes Robert Baker's film *The Siege of Sidney Street* (1960) as typical, being a fictionalisation of the 1911 shoot-out between émigré bank robbers and the police. Peter the Painter, the gang's leader, "combines the dissolute bohemianism and impulsive violence that constitute the classic stereotype of the wild anarchist." Sadly attempts by those sympathetic to the anarchist cause to rebut the stereotype have too often provided a gutted version of the politics they claim to espouse. Bo Widerberg's *Joe Hill* (1971) is one such case. The film creates "a sentimentalised Joe Hill who is more archetypal folk hero than anarchist or libertarian Marxist (and) avoids the more anarchistic components of Hill's life while emphasising his status as a folksy balladeer."

Lizzie Borden's 1983 film *Born In Flames* is preferred as an alternative, for its defence of revolutionary violence and its "disdain for social democracy." Porton recommends its "emphasis on alternative media as a locus of insurrectionary discontent" and claims that "Borden's inventive cinematic style is matched by her resourceful appropriation of... anti-authoritarian currents." As someone who thought *Born In Flames* flawed (because it reduced its politics to caricature and, with its focus on affinity groups and a futurist anarcho-feminist Women's Army, failed to portray an insurrectionary politics relevant to the here-and-now), I can't share Porton's enthusiasm. Nor do I agree that Ken Loach's 1995 *Land and Freedom* fails ultimately because it "much too often holds an admir-

able political stance hostage to wooden dramaturgy." Porton claims that "Throughout the film, a tenuous attempt can be discerned to contrast the current climate of political despair with the 1930s' arduous, if more optimistic, ideological battles." But it is precisely this attempt to provide a context for an audience coming to the debates around the Spanish Civil War for the first time, that sets *Land and Freedom* apart from works like *Born In Flames* or Jean Luc Godard's *Tout va Bien*. Porton refers to Godard's "anguished reflexivity" but *Tout Va Bien* oozes pseudo radical complacency, so assured of its formal radicalism that it takes form as an end in itself.

Porton notes favourably the Bakhtinian concept of the work of art as a "cacophony of voices", as a possible means of undermining the notion of authorial supremacy and moving towards a collaborative collectivist approach to film, but the examples he cites betray only the pretence of such cacophony. Loach at least, made genuine efforts to include real voices in his films. *Land and Freedom* includes a sequence where villagers debate the merits of agrarian collectivisation. Porton quotes Lisa Berger, a researcher on the film, who was responsible for finding "people who could argue for collectivisation... others who could be opposed and others who could see the point, but weren't really convinced, based on real, lived experience working in the countryside." If *Land and Freedom* tries to give voice to lived experience in its fictions, *Tout Va Bien* surely does the opposite in attempting to obscure the authorial voice (Godard's) and passing it off as authentic working class experience.

At the root of this is the question of aesthetics. Porton unfortunately never defines his own political groundings nor entirely comes clean about his own views on cinema and aesthetics. He says a "monolithic anarchist aesthetic must be dismissed as elusive and dubiously essentialist" quoting sympathetically Shelley's Romantic anarchism and concern to "champion the resources of creative immanence." Further, Proudhon, adhered to the notion that "a realist aesthetic represents the zenith of artistic achievement" and Bakunin "had little time for Rimbaudian inwardness and aesthetic formulations."

Porton claims the Situationist International as "profoundly indebted to anarchism", but concedes that Debord's (awful) *La Société du Spectacle* (1973) "reveals how his anti-authoritarianism manifested itself in oracular pronouncements that gave this potted version of his treatise a quasi-authoritarian tenor." (One might note also that Debord's "anti-authoritarianism" is called into question as much by the bitter personal infighting that wracked the SI, by his general boorishness and his drunken misogyny, as by his 'art', but the notion that aesthetics and practice ought, for revolutionary anarchists, to have some connection, appears to be one that Porton does not wish to address).

Those anarchists who have engaged with the development of an anarchist aesthetics through film criticism, like Emma Goldman (who attacked movies as the "opium of the masses") or Dwight Macdonald who believed "avant-garde is synonymous with high art", appear to have retreated to the ground occupied also by the likes of Theodor Adorno, cultural elitism disguised as a defence of modernism. Porton concludes only that it is "difficult to say authoritatively what anarchist plots, images and forms are or should be: they are constantly in flux and subject to revision." All well and good. It is certainly the case that an anarchist politics should seek to defend, as Porton puts it elsewhere, "the full range of aesthetic and political options that Stalinism sought to obliterate." As it is, though, this reduces political struggles around 'culture' to a defence of the avant garde. That this leads us nowhere is clear enough from the case of Adorno,

The Siege of Sidney Street



who railed against Jazz and saw Beethoven and Mahler as the aesthetic guardians of the age.

'Culture' is, essentially about communication. An anarchist praxis has to consider what is communicated, by whom, to whom, and crucially, who controls the medium of communication. Porton passes up the opportunity to seriously engage with these issues when he examines, somewhat cursorily, the works produced by the CNT following the collectivisation of the film industry. Among those produced were *Aurora de Esperanza* (1937) – charting the political development of an unemployed worker, *Nosotros somos Así!* (1937) – an anarcho syndicalist musical comedy, and the record of Durutti's funeral – *Entierro de Durutti*. Porton tells us that the CNT's films grew out of an "earnest, if sometimes inept, attempt to fuse radical politics with mass entertainment." Inept they may have been but it's surely the attempt to reach a popular audience with a radical message which is crucial here. Further, does our commitment to artistic revolution preclude, as it does for MacDonald "any attempt to mediate its results"?

Porton leaves us to conclude that the only options on offer are crude populist nostalgia trips or the tedious elitism embodied in the "creative jests" of Craig Baldwin's 1995 *Sonic Outlaws*. Because Porton refuses to take a position, the book fails to push any real debate forward, leaving us to conclude that "anything goes". He tells us that he does not propose a "Manichean division between 'retrograde' and 'progressive' styles of film-making" and that he is "chiefly concerned with films that explore and promote anarchist self-activity."

It is here that an otherwise entertaining and well-researched work falls on its face. Either there is no such thing as 'anarchist film' except in the widest sense of that "full range of aesthetic and political options", or it is possible to use film to "promote anarchist self-activity" and by implication there ought to be a specific anarchist praxis that engages with this possibility. In the CNT films, in the works of Loach and Jim Allen, I would contend such praxis can be glimpsed. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Blackwell 1990) David Harvey considers the films *Bladerunner* (Ridley Scott) and *Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders.) He notes that "Postmodern art forms and cultural artefacts by their very nature must self-consciously embrace the problem of image creation, and necessarily turn inwards upon themselves as a result. It then becomes difficult to escape being what is being imaged within the art form itself." It is clear that he fears this may not be an issue simply for what may be loosely



Young and innocent... fighting her oppressors with weapons no woman should know about!

termed the 'postmodern'.

What gave rise to such early enthusiasm for cinema as a potentially-liberating medium was the range of possibilities offered by its new techniques of recording motion, of cutting, of montage, and of playing with perspective. The problem, as Raymond Williams dryly noted, is: "When I was a student it was usual to say that montage and the dialectic were closely-related forms of the same revolutionary movement of thought. To be sure that was before we had seen what looked like the same kind of thing done in a thousand films of every conceivable ideological emphasis. That was a period in which it was still widely supposed that the new was inevitably the radical." (*Cinema and Socialism in Politics of Modernity*, Verso). The new, then, is not enough. Breaking ground within a medium immersed in the logic of capital is only to take part in the production of the next new thing. An anarchist intervention into cinema then, must surely address this. Harvey contends that the techniques of cinema are such that the very notion of a revolutionary cinema may be unrealisable; "Cinema is after all, the supreme maker and manipulator of images for commercial purposes, and the very act of using it well always entails reducing the complex stories of daily life to a sequence of images upon a depthless screen." The way out of this is perhaps to move away from what Harvey identifies as the "condition in which aesthetics predominate over ethics."

If the best a revolutionary cinema can achieve is to end the predominance of "aesthetics over ethics" in film-making then the key to an anarchist praxis might be simply in seeking to allow those normally unheard to speak. Williams talks of a

return to cinematic naturalism as one way of doing this; "For the central socialist case, in all matters of culture, is that the lives of the great majority of people have been and still are almost wholly disregarded by most arts. It can be important to contest these selective arts within their own terms but our central commitment ought always to be those areas of hitherto silent or fragmented or positively misrepresented experience."

The League of Revolutionary Black Workers worked with the New York Newsreel group in 1970 to produce a film about their politics and their interventions in Detroit – *Finally Got the News*. Fusing a montage history of American labour with Detroit music and League leaders talking straight to camera, it's probably the best contemporary example of a revolutionary group successfully combining "aesthetics and ethics" in that it allows the politics of the group to be at the forefront without swamping the film as 'film'.

Film and the Anarchist Imagination should be read. It is the first comprehensive survey of anarchism in film. Porton defends ably the anarchist legacy against the distortions of its cinematic portrayals. As a writer, he is lively and informative and his love of film and genuine desire to retrieve a lost history of radical film-making leap from the pages. Porton argues that "In recent years, certain scholars seem to believe that anarchism is a sub-variety of postmodernism, thereby ignoring more than a hundred years of labor agitation and revolutionary struggles". *Film and the Anarchist Imagination* endeavours to demonstrate how these struggles have been both celebrated and derided by a diverse group of film-makers. ■

Detroit – I Do Mind Dying presents the history of the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, described by the socialist activist Manning Marable, in the book's introduction, as "in many respects the most significant expression of black radical thought and activism in the 1960s. At a time when even reactionary politicians such as Richard Nixon were embracing the slogan 'Black Power', the League represented a militant black perspective calling for the fundamental socialist transformation of American society."

The League's roots were in the 1967 Detroit uprising, which led to over 3,800 arrests and the military occupation of Detroit by the Michigan National Guard. In the aftermath of the Great Rebellion, a group of activists began to produce a newspaper, *Inner City Voice* (icv), which set its goal as being the production of a revolutionary paper produced by, and written in

and bigoted foremen, harassing, insulting, driving and snapping the whip over the backs of thousands of black workers, who have to work in these plants in order to eke out an existence." The icv collective set out to smash niggerism in Detroit.

One of the key icv activists was General Gordon Baker, who worked at Dodge Main, an assembly plant of Chrysler Corporation. Baker pulled together a group of workers who began to meet at the icv offices. Within ten months of the Detroit Rebellion, the group around the icv had begun to hit back at the auto industry. On 2 May 1968, 14,000 auto workers shut down Dodge Main in the first wildcat strike to hit the factory in 14 years. The immediate cause was 'speed-up' and the driving force behind the strike was the icv group, which now named itself DRUM (the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement). DRUM inspired the initiation of other independent black

Wayne State University campus newspaper, and turned the paper into a voice for "the interests of impoverished, oppressed, exploited and powerless", with a daily run of 18,000. From there, the League produced a film, *Finally Got the News*, and through the involvement of radical black lawyer Ken Cockrel, entered into community organisation against police oppression which culminated in League supporter Justin Ravitz becoming a Recorder's Court Judge. In moving the focus of struggle to the cultural/community arena, the League neglected its industrial base, activists began to drift away to other groups, and the League shattered as individual activists became locked into cultural-political agendas, each arguing for the importance of his/her forum over other League activities. As League activist Mike Hamlin sums up, "The League began to recruit large numbers of students and

DETROIT – I DO MIND DYING

Dan Georgakas & Marvin Surkin (Redwords)

the language of, the urban black working class. The icv's agenda was set out in one of its first editorials: "In the July Rebellion we administered a beating to the behind of the power structure, but apparently our message didn't get over... We are still working, still working too hard, getting paid too little, living in bad housing, sending our kids to sub-standard schools... only a people who are strong, unified, armed and know the enemy can carry on the struggles which lay ahead of us. Think about it, brother, things ain't hardly getting better. The Revolution must continue."

Detroit's massive auto plants were built on "niggerism" – the super-exploitation of the black working class. As the icv described it "Black workers are tied day in and day out, 8 - 12 hours a day, to a massive assembly line, an assembly line that one never sees the end or the beginning of but merely fits into a slot and stays there, swearing and bleeding, running and stumbling, trying to maintain a steadily-increasing pace. Added to the severity of working conditions are the white racist

workers' groups, FRUMI at Ford's massive River Rouge plant, and ELRUM at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant. Other RUMs were established in the steel mills of Birmingham, and the auto plants of Fremont, California and Baltimore, Maryland. The Detroit RUMs coalesced into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers.

The League's activities were a real threat to the effective operation of capital in Detroit. The auto industry arrayed a mass of police, private security and white union members to physically smash the League, but through a combination of discipline and militancy, the League continued to wage "the revolutionary struggle of the ghetto." At one point, a fascist group, Breakthrough, attempted to disrupt an icv public meeting. The paper tersely reported, "Lobsinger (the Breakthrough organiser) found one of his followers laying in the lavatory in a pool of his own blood."

The success of the League, as the book explains, was in part the cause of its downfall. Students linked to the League took editorial control of the South End, the

professionals. I think that our understanding of proletarian consciousness at that time was very low and we did not do a good job of transforming the understanding of our new members. We were held together by personal loyalties rather than ideology... Community organising and industrial organising are linked up. They go together. The working class should lead the community effort."

It is easy, at a time when working class self-activity is at such a low level, to focus on the failures of the League. Yet the its achievements, the extent of its success, the threat it posed to Detroit capital, and the political alternative it represented (a syndicalist Marxism) to the student-orientated Maoism of the us left, have been a resource for labour and community activists in Detroit through to today. *Detroit – I Do Mind Dying* is proof, faced with a middle reformist left, of how working class rage can hit its class enemy effectively. At its best the League was an inspiring example of what working class revolutionary organisation really looks like. ■

Twenty-first Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for a New Millennium

Various authors, edited by Jon Purkis and James Bowen, London, Cassell 1997

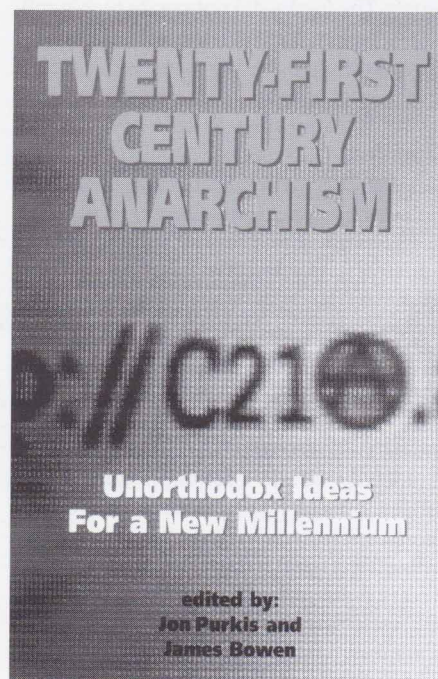
This collection of essays is optimistically introduced with the statement: "Modern anarchism has long-since needed a major overhaul, and this book... while happily rejecting much of the historical baggage... is part of a new theoretical and practical tradition which has started to develop over the last few years." There is little that is futuristic or original about this book. It is an ethnocentric survey of the last few decades of twentieth century British (sub-)culture by a group of trendy academics and PhD students. The 'new theoretical tradition' is that of the fraudulent gibberish collectively known as postmodernism/structuralism. This is blended with a generous serving of liberal environmentalism and a little postmodern feminism.

The 'practical' revolutionary tactics of the next millennium are, we are told, best illustrated or foreshadowed by aspects of youth subculture and the road protest movement. The unnecessary 'historical baggage' is a neat euphemism that really means the authors reject any meaningful industrial or class analysis whatsoever. In this respect the book can be likened to 'New Labour' in comparison to traditional Labour Party politics.

The introductory essays are rather traditional academic articles. The first examines concepts of human nature. It concludes that the traditional anarchist notion of the environmental malleability of human nature conflicts with the rather deterministic assertion that power always corrupts. This contradictory duality, it is suggested, rather than theoretically undermining the anarchist position is a creative antinomy grounded in empirical fact. The essay ends by warning (as if we needed warning!) anarchists against new rightism/libertarianism, (with its inherently authoritarian notion of a minimal state) and existentialism (with its emphasis on human choice – as people can equally-well

choose fascism or anarchism!). This parasitic essay is entirely unoriginal and adds nothing whatever to anarchist theory. The second essay criticises state-welfarism on the familiar grounds that it is biased in favour of the middle classes (in terms of access to health facilities and university education), it merely contains capitalism, and encourages individualistic atomism through discouraging spontaneous and local mutual aid. Many anarchists, and no/low state socialists have been saying this for years. The essay argues for the development of participatory neighbourhood self-help groups but offers no practical suggestions nor examines any contemporary examples. The third essay focuses on non-violent resistance. It liberally quotes from (the ascetic state-nationalist) Gandhi and focuses upon road protests in the UK. The industrial aspects/origins of the concept and practice of direct action within the workers' movement are not discussed at all!

The second part of the book examines contemporary (alternative) culture. The first essay examines the 'Anarchy in the UK Festival', chiding members of the *Black Flag* group and other old-fashioned workerist fanatics for ridiculing bizarre sub-cultural critiques and their rejection of popular (TV) media as a monolithic vehicle for promoting undiluted capitalist propaganda. With a fair whack of meaningless postmodern jargon the author surveys some examples of 'subversive' British cultural trends/movements/writings. There is a long discussion of 'Mr Blobby', some trash TV personality, of whom the rest of the world (outside Britain) are thankfully unfamiliar. As usual with many British political works (which seem to assume that they are still the Centre of some vast world empire), this analysis is ethnocentric, insular and of no interest or relevance to people from other countries (including other English-



speaking former colonies such as Australia). The second essay continues with the same themes. It asks us to reject traditional (read: economic, class, industrial, workerist) methods of social resistance in favour, of "symbolic, playful and culturally-expressed" ones (since when has anarchism not been interested in culture?) A number of self-edited/produced xerox zines are reviewed. These reviews are remarkable only in the degree of vacuity they display. Self-indulgent, occasionally humorous, but essentially useless marginalia is certainly symbolic and playful. Nobody denies that symbolic playfulness (ie. political humour) is a part of life, and a nice part, but it is hardly the stuff of revolutions. Political humour is more a way of letting-off steam by laughing at those who oppress, rule or frustrate you. Beyond this, the political cartoon and other forms of satire have a long history in both →

← mainstream and revolutionary media, but the author seems painfully unaware of this historical dimension.

The next essay is more interesting and examines the rise and fall of DIY culture and record labels during the punk music/fashion era. Again, however, the author assumes that this is a completely new phenomenon. There is however, a long tradition of youth and other marginalised groups (eg. Black Americans) creating their own unique entertainment with very limited resources. The cotton pickin' blues singers which started rock n roll were co-opted and commercialised by white imitators. And every new generation have created their own interpretation and expression of it. Fashion and musical expression have always come from the people. The media did not create rock 'n roll, flower power, punk, or the rave scene etc. Again and again in the twentieth century young people who can't afford the pre-packaged entertainment offered them and wishing to differentiate themselves from the previous generation have generated their own expressions. Commercialisation comes later. The entertainment/fashion industry is big business and has always lived off the popular creativity of the masses. This is undoubtedly an interesting area of inquiry. However, fashion, and the youth who create it, are transient and epiphenomenal aspects of life. We cannot and should not ignore it, but politics is essentially about economic and social battles, not teenage fashion statements. The last essay on culture examines the ambiguous notion of 'subversion' as a literary, legal and political term. It begins by raising a few interesting points but degenerates behind a smokescreen of post-modernist verbiage.

The final section of the book is cryptically entitled "If Not Now, When?" It contains four essays. The first examines transport. It is a largely unoriginal philosophical overview of personal transport politics in relation to spatial (re: geographical) and environmental issues. It offers no practical solutions (other than individual lifestyle choices) and adds little to an important and ongoing debate. The next essay thinly examines the decline in full-time employment/work ethic and uninspiringly promotes the anti-work/why work? position. It ends by suggesting that May 2 should be declared a 'day of idleness'. Even this idea is not original but attributed by the author to a bunch of Argentinean beach bums. I might point out that orthodox Jews (re: Sabbath) have practiced this on a weekly basis for four or five thousand years. The penultimate essay looks at sexual transgression and how the public exhibition of unorthodox sexualities

sometimes fails to address broader issues of social change. To this is added a few scattered comments on postmodernism and cybersex.

The ending of this book is truly bizarre. It consists of a series of quite unrelated, half-baked paragraphs by some would-be futurist/novelist, who presents some pessimistic and some optimistic flashes of several imagined futures. Although the idea of ending a book (which is purportedly futurist) with a short work of fiction is not inherently silly, what we are presented with is very silly indeed and completely incoherent. In order to deconstruct presumably one must construct something first.

Although this book contains a few scattered insights and some of the discussions are in themselves interesting or entertaining, as one would hope from an anthology comprising the work of many (university lecturer and student) brains, from the point of view of anarchist theory it has absolutely nothing of value to offer. In so far as it does not provide any introduction to anarchism for someone unfamiliar with the idea/movement, and explicitly rejects traditional anarchist ideas/practices, it is positively harmful. It can only serve to confuse and obfuscate. Utter Crap! Shame on all of you! ■

Graham Purchase

Pacifism as Pathology

by Ward Churchill
(Arbeiter Ring)

Essential Reading. Churchill's attack on the gutless pacifism of the us left is just as relevant here. As he says "what is at issue... is not the replacement of hegemonic pacifism with some cult of terror. Instead, it is the realisation that in order to be effective and ultimately successful any revolutionary movement within advanced capitalist nations must develop the broadest possible range of action by which to confront the state. They should be conceived not as an array of component forms of struggle, but as a continuum of activity stretching from petitions/letter-writing and so forth through many mobilisations/demonstrations onwards into the arena of armed self-defence and still onwards through the realm of offensive military operations."

The bottom line. Either we build a revolutionary movement that is entirely rhetorical, that confines its resistance to what the state will allow (demos along agreed routes, lollipop placards, etc.) or we build a movement that seeks to use all means at its disposal to make a difference, to make history. "In order to achieve non-violence, we must first break with it in over-coming its root causes. Therein, however, lies our only hope."

Obituary

Karl Kreuger
December 1946 – March 1999

Some of our readers may remember Dutch anarchist Karl Max Kreuger from The Hague. Karl used to sell English-language anarchist literature in the Netherlands, and came over to the annual Anarchist Book Fair in London. Karl died in his sleep, aged 52, from a stroke, in March this year.

Karl was, in many ways, almost a stereotype of an anarchist – gentle, attuned to nature's rhythms, yet passionate about fighting for a better, freer world. He was consciously non-sectarian when it came to international contacts, as well as supporting much of the English language anarchist press, Karl was the contact for both the iwa and the A-infos project in the Netherlands. When the Marxists expelled the anarchists from the Dutch union the ovb, Karl became a founder member of the Vrije Bond. Typically, the dispute with the ovb had been that it failed to take an interest outside the workplace – something no anarchist would go along with.

Karl's last journey was by bicycle. Around 200 friends and comrades accompanied the black-covered carrier-cycle from long-established Hague squat De Blaue Aanslag through the city centre to the crematorium. The coffin was embellished with children's drawings and last greetings of friends, and later that day the funeral procession walked along the beach.

Redemption Song

Mike Marqusee, Verso £17 hardback



In 1996, a frail, trembling Muhammad Ali was cast in a starring role in the opening ceremony of the Atlanta Olympics. Ali's role was to light the Olympic torch as the climax of the 84 day Coca Cola sponsored torch relay. In 1960, in protest against the all-American racism which he saw as a mockery of the Olympic ideal, Ali had flung his Olympic gold medal into the Ohio River. In 1996 he was presented with a replacement medal by, as Mike Marqusee dryly notes, "the Olympic boss and former Francoist, Juan Antonio Samaranch."

Ali attended the Atlanta ceremonies as an American hero. Marqusee's book tells the story of a different Ali, the Ali who consorted with Malcolm X; who joined the Nation of Islam; who "refused to serve America in time of war and as a result was threatened with prison, barred from practising his trade, harassed by his government and condemned by his country's media." Marqusee wants to reclaim Ali as a symbol of resistance, and in *Redemption Song* he succeeds admirably.

On February 25 1964, Ali, (then still fighting as Cassius Clay) defeated Sonny Liston against the odds to become the heavyweight champion of the world. The next morning he held a press conference and announced his membership of the Nation of Islam: "I was baptised when I was twelve, but I didn't know what I was doing. I'm not a Christian any more. I know where I'm going, and I know the truth, and I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want."

"I don't have to be what you want me to be." For Marqusee, those words and Ali's subsequent career, have a resonance that echoes through all of the battles of the 60s. Ali's bravado, his refusal; to allow a white media to determine the limits of his identity, come to symbolise the search for personal freedom of a generation.

Boxing, as Marqusee notes, is seen by a

predominantly middle class media as "an expression of ghetto criminality or primitive aggression or some innate human propensity for violence." In recording Ali's dignity and skill in the ring, and his articulate militancy outside it, he marks out an alternative perception of the sport as "a highly structured response to and safe haven from the anarchy of poverty. It is not boxing itself, but its historically constructed social and economic framework which has ensured the persistence of criminality and exploitation."

Sport, generally, is perceived all too often by writers either as empty spectacle or a site of the rituals of commerce. If those who participate are written of as little more than expensive human chess pieces, those who pay to watch are entirely absent from the record. Marqusee's book is important for its recognition of sport as both a real and a metaphoric battlefield for the forces of progress and reaction which contend in society "at large": "The loyalties and identifications are not inherent in the spectacle; the tie between spectator and competitor is a constructed one, and the meanings it carries for either are generated by the histories – collective, individual – brought to bear on a contest that would otherwise be devoid of significance to all but direct participants."

Redemption Song gives us a history of the black heavyweight as 'symbolic representative' of the black community; detailing the racism endured by fighters like Jack Johnson and Joe Louis as they "wrestled with this ambiguous burden, the burden of making 'blackness' present in a white-dominated world." It is Ali, though, whose wit, vigour and refusal to be other than he wished to be, dominate every page.

Ali's relationship with the Nation of Islam is counterposed to Malcolm X's break with Elijah Muhammed and his quest for a "new freedom of political action." At a time

when the ban on Louis Farrakhan entering the UK has just been renewed, one cannot help but reflect on Marqusee's acknowledgement of the significance of the NOI as being in its linking "the individual to the collective, self-discovery to nationhood."

Marqusee recognises the weakness of the NOI as being its social and political conservatism, its strength residing in its roots "within and against the culture of the ghetto." It is worthy of note, then, that in banning Farrakhan, Jack Straw has determined that black youth in the UK will not be accorded their right to be "free to be what I want." As *Redemption Song* makes clear, so many of the battles of the '60s remain to be fought again.

Marqusee takes us through Ali's fight against the draft, his journeys to Africa, his role as figurehead for the wider anti-war movement. He touches on the development of a pan African consciousness, links in WE Du Bois and Paul Robeson with Patrice Lumumba, CLR James with Bob Dylan and Michael X, and makes the connections between cultural and political upheavals with an exhilarating sweep that recalls Greil Marcus at his best.

Redemption Song is a genuinely inspiring work. Marqusee's wider theme, in restoring Ali as a symbol of courage and radical conviction, is the way in which popular culture can be "simultaneously a vehicle of protest and a vehicle of incorporation." Marqusee intends to reclaim Ali from the marketplace where he serves as an "instrument for monetary gain or national aggrandisement" and pay tribute instead to his "example of personal moral witness, of border crossing solidarity." In this, and in his goal of linking the often derided values of those who fought for change throughout the '60s to the "common future of humanity" he succeeds, with a wit and fervour that are testimony to that spirit of resistance he seeks to uphold. ■

more reviews

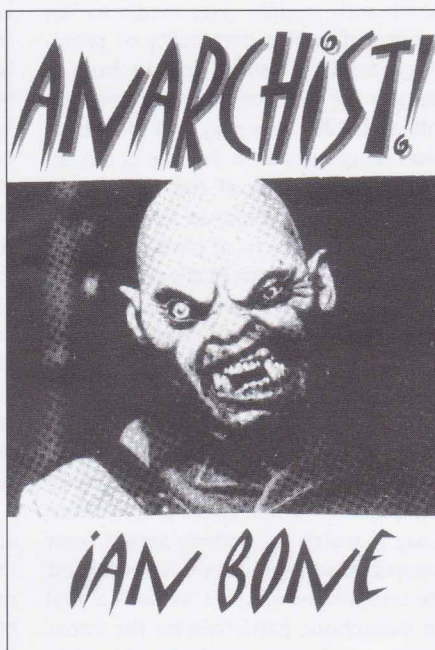
Camden Parasites

by Daniel Lux – Unpopular Books, £9.95

Daniel Lux was a work-shy, thieving druggie who supported himself for much of his adult life by poncing off the middle classes. He came from a poor family and started professional shoplifting as a school boy. Shortly after, he discovered almost simultaneously, drugs, and in London's Hampstead, the middle class. Why were these people so much better off than his family? His early attempt to achieve the middle class life style he envied by becoming a pop star failed and instead he used his personal charm to acquire a succession of middle class girlfriends so that he could sponge off their families. Going through people's coats at parties looking for cash was a staple. Professional shoplifting led to a few nickings (but only a few, and those spread over many years); over the top drug use led, at varying times, to hepatitis, a spell of impotence, heroin addiction, breakdown and a spell in mental hospital. Periods of dead end jobs that he hated, (in other words, normal unskilled work), and stays in filthy junkie squats alternated with living in the large house of the family of the latest girlfriend.

Camden Parasites is an addition to the growing body of literature on the nature of the middle class, (other titles include *The Circled A and its Parasites*, *Collectable Anorak* and *The Enemy is Middle Class*), but from an individualist rather than an anarchist perspective. Would Danny have seen anything wrong with society if he had been born middle class instead of working class? He combines a healthy dislike of the middle classes, their patronising and contemptuous attitude to the working class and the way they speak, with jealousy of their wealth. Apparent sympathy for the working class is offset by contempt for most of the working class people he knew, a contempt he later transferred to the middle classes when he got to know them better. He has psychological insights into the middle classes but no analysis of them. Is it really true that all the middle class live off inherited wealth so that their jobs are nothing more than hobbies? This is true of some, but surely not all of them. Danny doesn't try to work out how things got to be as they are, and has no suggestions for changing them other than his own per-

sonal style of hedonism. He is honest, funny and vicious, exploiting dim middle class women for his own benefit. The book ends on a high. Long clear of heroin, Danny has escaped the streets by installing himself in the house of the family of yet another middle class girlfriend. He says he is "back where he belonged, among people who deserved me." The author died taking heroin in February 1999. Those who live by the needle die by it.



Anarchist

by Ian Bone – £3.00

Autobiography – fact and fiction inextricably mixed – but would there be any point in trying to disentangle them even if it were possible? The riots of the eighties turn into fiction when a Reclaim the Streets action in Bristol ends with half a dozen police burned to death. Anarchos and rioters are jailed and the handful of anarchos still on the loose try to free the prisoners by digging up Princess Diana's corpse and holding it ransom. Diana's coffin turns out to be empty, but in the Diana Museum, the frustrated grave robbers secretly photograph Diana's brother having sex with her embalmed corpse which is disguised as a waxwork. When an enterprising pornographer

releases the photos onto the Internet, a disillusioned mob sacks Buckingham Palace. A somewhat unlikely scenario to say the least.

Ian Bone was one of the key figures in Class War back in the mid-eighties, continuing his earlier activism, and is still busy today, not least as one of the members of punk band The Living Legends. *Anarchist* is his first novel, an all-action narrative further enlivened by sex, alcoholism, and near constant expletives. The philosophical background, as opposed to the factual one of Britain in the eighties, is the psychopathic wing of anarchism, Lucy Parsons, Emile Negri, Sergei Nechayev and the rest. The underlying theory, that our society can be sparked into a revolution at any moment by a catalyst of some sort, is one I totally disagree with but *Anarchist* is still well worth a read.

Heavy Burden on Young Shoulders

Available from BF [send an SAE].

A chronology and analysis of the schools occupation movement that rocked Greece in the past academic year. A third of Greek high schools were occupied, some for months. Students set up road blocks and defended their occupations from the police, the state, the ruling socialist party and their parents. Written by participants the previous year's teacher's struggle.

Prisoners and Partisans

A5 38 pages £1.50
from Kate Sharpley Library

Italian Anarchists in the Struggle against Fascism. A collection of articles translated from the Italian anarchist paper *Umanita Nova* mostly written in the 80s. The pamphlet covers aspects of anarchist and working class history through the years of fascism and war through to anti-fascist squads after the war. A lot of it is quite dry history but it does include on a lighter note the attempts on El Duce's life including Gino Lucetti's immortal words: "I did not come with a bouquet of flowers for Mussolini. I also meant to make use of my revolver if I failed to achieve my purpose with the bomb".

letters

Dear Black Flag,

F Malone is quite right about exploding policemen. The toxic particles released by constabulary combustion are a bio-hazard which must be taken seriously. Unfortunately, I have been unable to track down a copy of her pamphlet *Disposing of State Agents The Responsible Way* despite several visits to Freedom Books. However I find her alternative of burial in a shallow trench combined with the cultivation of runner beans most alarming. This carries the risk that a dangerous combination of authoritarianism and stupidity may be absorbed through the root system of the beans and affect the brain tissue of anyone consuming them. These elements may be activated by television, advertising etc. to produce serious degenerative disease.

'Closed circle' methods of disposal are to be preferred, but it is important they are not over-elaborate. It really isn't necessary to grind up cops and process them into cattle fodder, then slaughter the cattle to manufacture hamburgers for exclusive consumption in police canteens. Abuse of animals can be avoided, and a great saving in energy achieved, by eliminating the bovine stage altogether. Statistics prove that police catering departments are unable to detect any difference, even when strands of blue serge remain embedded in the victuals.

Arbuthnot Maladaptive

Greetings Black Flag,

I am the current secretary of the Anarcho Syndicalist Group of Melbourne. You published an article in BF 216 titled *A Visit to the Paris CNT*. I wish to reply to the article as an individual.

The author of the article, Ben Debney, is neither a current paid-up member of an iwa section nor has he ever been one to my knowledge. In his article, Ben Debney states "There would appear to be no shortage of cases in the iwa's recent history where ideological witch-hunting was used as a cheap substitute for constructive criticism." I am not a member of the iwa, but merely a supporter, as Australia currently has no official iwa section. So, as a supporter, I don't consider myself to be in a position to analyse the expulsion of the Vignoles CNT except to say that expelling a section from an international organisation (iwa) for apparent contravention of sta-

tutes is not necessarily an 'an ideological witch-hunt'. If Ben felt there was an ideological witch-hunt, then why did he not mention names, dates, instances, and documentation as to how, when, and where such an event took place.

Ben also has the following to say in the article. "Perhaps the reason is simply that, because an organisation is growing, and if founded by anarchists is not longer purely anarchist, it becomes a threat to the ideological purists who want to keep things nice and secure, if a little uneventful." Again, where is the documentation of iwa sections being controlled by 'ideological purists'. Where is the documentation that the iwa remains uneventful in the name of 'ideological purity'. I have read the iwa statutes, and nowhere have I seen it as a precondition to joining the iwa that one has to succumb to ideological purity!

Ben's article began as an interesting piece about the activities of the expelled section, but deteriorated into an opinionated slur. I am not interested in 'perhaps' or 'there would appear' lines of thought when it is not backed up by facts. Leave that for the Murdoch press.

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Reply: The splits in the iwa in France and Italy, and the mud-slinging that has surrounded them, are all too well known. Some iwa members pretend that this is a matter only for them, and doesn't even concern those who have been expelled. We disagree, particularly as the iwa has changed over the last ten years or so from an organisation grouping together unions and propaganda groups to one that consists of two unions and a few dozen propaganda groups (some of which are so small as to be unworkable). Accusations and counter-accusations have been well publicised, particularly between the French CNT-Vignoles and the iwa Secretariat based in Madrid, then Granada. Much of this has been in Spanish or French, but there have been reports on the split in English in *Black Flag* (a lengthy article in 211) and *Libertarian Labor Review*.

While we agree that "expelling a section from an international organisation for

apparently contravening of statutes is not necessarily an 'an ideological witch-hunt'," the context is more disturbing. At the XXth Congress of the iwa, at which the majority of the French CNT were expelled, changes were also made to the iwa statutes which insisted that failure to comply with "tactics" was reason for expulsion. Whatever way you look at it, the iwa failed to follow its own procedures at that Congress and expelled its largest affiliate. It is not so much the statutes of the iwa that demand "ideological purity" (though the new version leaves areas for concern) but the practice of the iwa Secretariat (and in effect, its biggest remaining affiliate the Spanish CNT). The German section, the FAU, have been criticised for participating in the European March Against G8 in Cologne, alongside the CNT-Vignoles, the SAC and the Spanish CGT. Surely the real question to be asked is why were there no other iwa affiliates there?

Dear BF

I was dismayed to read the article *No Easy Answers - Looking at the Balkans War* in BF217. Your introduction mentions the 'No War But The Class War' group in London, and other articles report on anti-war action in Greece and Italy. However the main piece by a member of Workers' Aid for Kosova is at best an apology for NATO's bombing of Serbia, though it is confusingly interspersed with unrelated quotes against the bombings (which maybe you thought would give some kind of balance?). The sentence "The Kosova Albanians have the right to call for NATO actions" says it all. Bob Myers' use of words like fascism and genocide ape the propaganda of the governments who have carried out a barbarity in Serbia, and made Kosovo/a an occupied wasteland. Are we now going to be asked to find the killing and ousting of non-Albanians from Kosovo/a by the KLA understandable or even acceptable? The main worry of the author seems to be that the KLA would be sold out by NATO. Workers Aid believe in taking sides as they did over Bosnia. There is no class solidarity here, and no internationalism worthy of an anarchist publication.

Mike, member of the Anarchist Federation (previously ACF), Nottingham
AF material about the war :
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